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January 26, 2009

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63rd year of publication

Uncertain future, certainty of God

Sarah de Boer

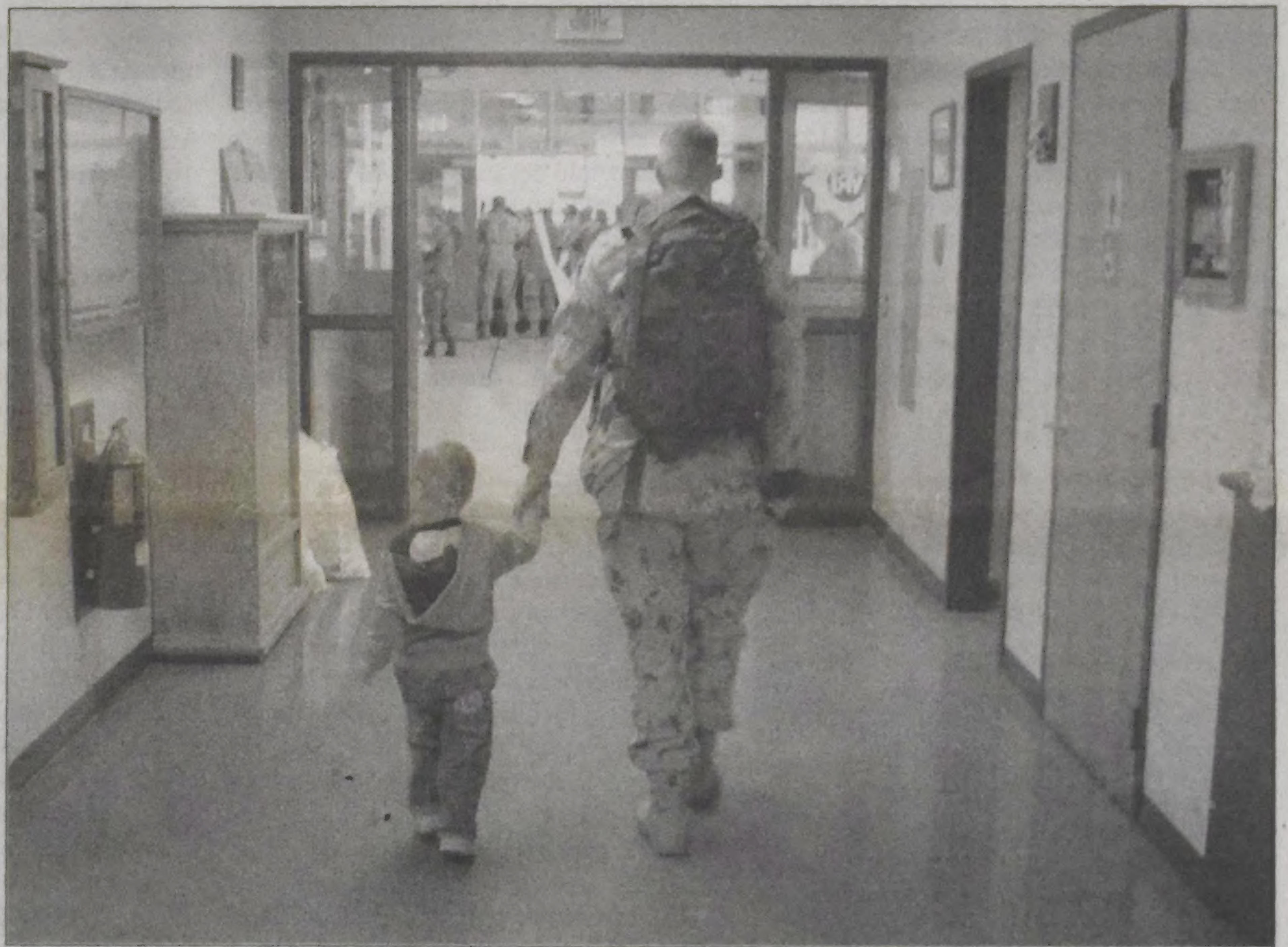
If someone had told me twenty years ago that I would marry a soldier who would eventually be sent off to war, I would likely have responded with the stereotypical pre-teen's mantra of "Whatever?!" followed by, "Canada had soldiers? As if!" But that is exactly where I have found myself today – experiencing the rewards and challenges of living with a soldier in the Canadian Armed Forces. There is more to the military family's life than dealing with deployments, but that's because almost everything else is in preparation for the actual tour.

My husband, Josh, was in the reserves before we were engaged. Several months later, following our engagement, he asked what I

thought of him joining the regular forces. Knowing very little about the lifestyle but willing to adapt, I agreed. When the time came for him to sign on the dotted line, a recruiting officer looked at me and asked "Do you know what you're getting into?" I think my reply was an unconfident "Not really."

Uncertainty and adaptation would become a predominant part of my life as a military spouse. Uncertainty about where, when and how long any posting, course, exercise or tour would be; about military jargon in general, since acronyms are used for virtually everything; and about whether I was capable of adapting to a constantly changing schedule or extended absences.

We were married, and – as a member of the regular forces – Josh was posted to the Canadian Forces Base in Petawawa, where we are to this day. I had never heard of, much less been to, Petawawa. When Josh reported for duty, it appeared that some paperwork



MCpl de Boer and his son, Isaac

had been overlooked. There were no married quarters ready, only a room for Josh in "the shacks." This was my first taste of military-induced separation. I returned to my home-town, a five-hour drive

away. One month later, housing arrangements were completed. We had about four weeks together, in a rented townhouse on base, before Josh was sent off to North Carolina for a month-long exercise. This

separation pattern would prove to be the norm.

Fortunately, my husband's second tour departed five years after his first, and each tour has

See Certainty of God on p.2

Phoning Afghanistan

Knowing that Josh will be absent for the majority of our youngest's first year puts emphasis on the importance of communication. I am grateful for the luxury of digital photos so that he can see our baby develop. I am also grateful that our communication options are not limited to the postal service. Although telephone conversations are infrequent, about once a week or less, and the connection is often poor, they are a welcome bit of joy to any day. Our three-year old son loves to chat with his daddy on the speaker phone, or if we're lucky, to see him on the webcam. Instant messaging is a blessing as well, but is as equally difficult to end as a telephone conversation.

The desperate plight of Iraqi Christians

Bassam
Madany

In the 1990s, the international community helped the Kurds in the northern part of Iraq by establishing a safe zone from the forces of Saddam Hussein.

Currently, the victims of



Iraqi Christians gather in their destroyed church

organized campaigns of ethnic-religious cleansing in their historic homeland are the Christians in Iraq – and they are mostly Chaldean Assyrians, the original inhabitants of the country. Thousands of Iraqi Christians have already been murdered, and more than 250,000 have been forced to seek refuge outside Iraq. Western nations, however, have not offered much more than words of regret and condemnation and aid for the dispossessed.

The American intervention in Iraq successfully toppled the reign of the despot Saddam Hussein, but it had unintended consequences. The lawlessness after the liberation unleashed terrorist attacks on U.S. soldiers and precipitated bloody warfare between Sunnis and Shi'ites. No sooner had a relative peace been established, and al-Qaeda forces routed, then a shocking campaign of ethnic cleansing began. It was against

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News

Iraqi Christians ... continued from page 1

Christians, Mandeans, Sabeans, and Yezidis. First these minorities were marginalized, then had their property destroyed; now, they are being systematically killed.

"Just as in all of the previous blood-drenched chapters of the colonialism of the Ottoman Empire, the perpetrators have been Muslims, whether Turks or Kurds, Arabs, or foreigners. Today, the Christian community has almost completely disappeared from the Arabian Peninsula, especially in Turkey and Iran. Against the backdrop of such ethnic and religious tyranny, Eastern Christians have been forced to seek refuge and safe havens in other countries. Their dreams of becoming citizens of modern secular states are being shattered everywhere" (translated from *Elaph* website).

After the terrible events of 9/11, a French author living in Lebanon predicted that "Christians living in the Muslim world would become martyrs on account of their faith, and victims of the radical Islamist aggression" (Annie Laurent). Sadly, this has become true. "There is no doubt the American invasion of Iraq in March of

2003 increased the deterioration of the security situation in the area, allowing the Islamist movements to concentrate their attacks on the Eastern Christians of Iraq. Reports indicate that the mass murders and expulsion of the Christians of Mosul and other Iraqi cities occur under the very eyes of the American and Iraqi armies, and in collaboration with some militant Iraqi groups" (*Elaph*).

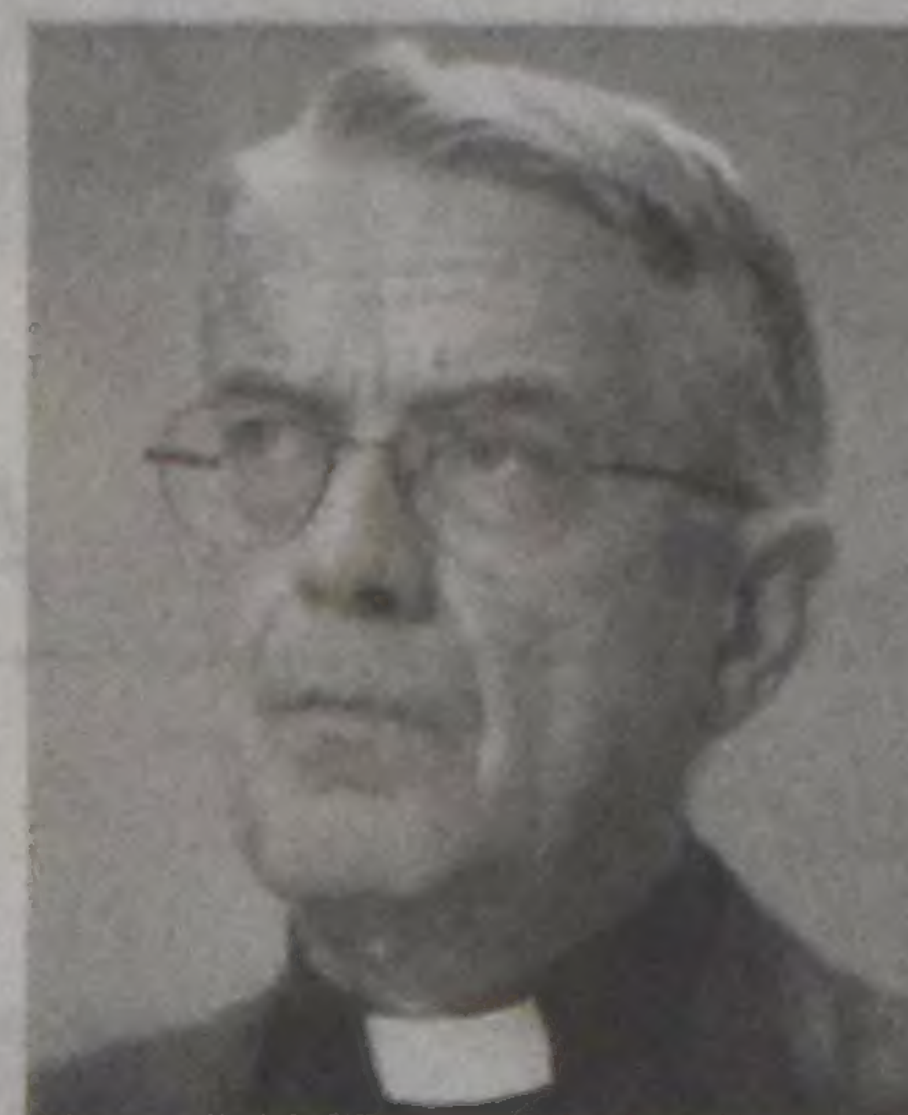
One Arab writer states that "we are terribly disappointed and angry at the International Community for its unwillingness to protect Iraqi Christians. Isn't it rather surprising and questionable that, at the very time when Iraq is being emptied of its Christian population and its other small ancient community groups such as the Sabeans, Mandeans and Yezidis, the French ambassador in Baghdad would declare that 'the Europeans were pleased with the rise of a pluralist and democratic Iraq'?"

I believe that several factors have contributed to the world's neglect of the condition of Iraqi Christians. The Iraqi government, for instance, has been

preoccupied with negotiating the terms of a treaty with the United States.

Another factor is the truism that people in general have trouble seeing beyond their own interests, and many are preoccupied with the serious economic downturn. One blessing of the 21st century is that, with the internet's help, more people are becoming aware of the persecution of Christians in the Arab world, and specifically in Iraq.

Several Christian leaders in the Middle East and elsewhere have expressed deep sadness about the plight of Christians in Mosul and other parts of Iraq, charging the Iraqi government and the occupying American forces with responsibility for the protection of Christians and all other



Father Frederico Lombardi

minorities in the country. Last November, Father Frederico Lombardi, Pope Benedict XVI's representative, questioned whether the Iraqi government was serious about protecting Christians in Mosul.

Is the international community waiting for an increase in the number of murdered Christians before they are convinced of the failure or unwillingness of the Iraqi government to step in?

It is now the turn of Western Christians, basking in their freedoms, to come to the aid of their brothers and sisters in Mesopotamia. We should make every attempt to prevail upon our political leaders in voices loud and clear, by telling them not to forget the Christians, Mandeans, Sabeans, and Yezidis in Iraq.

Rev. Bassam M. Madany was the Arabic Broadcast minister of the Back to God Hour from 1958 to 1994. He and his late wife Shirley began their retirement ministry, Middle East Resources, where they offer information on the global challenge of Islam.

Certainty of God ... continued from page 1

been 6-7 months long. This does not mean, however, that he has been home for the interim. Aside from the time he spends in

How often do Canadian soldiers go on tour?

Frequency and length of absences vary from soldier to soldier. Some troops are on tour of duty (also known as "in theatre") for 10 months or even more at a time; a few venture overseas for only a month or two; some deploy 3 times in the span of 4 years; others only once in seven years or even less.

theatre, Josh is away on a regular basis. In our eight years of marriage, he has been away for approximately three years, off and on. This comes mainly in the form of training exercises and courses, but tours of duty are also included.

Notice for the courses and exercises can be short, sometimes only days before departing for several weeks. I find this to be a particularly challenging part of military family life. Dates change so frequently that it is almost surprising when a course or exercise occurs as originally scheduled. Needless to say, flexibility is an asset.

The anticipation of a tour can be just as difficult as the tour itself. We were notified

in 2006 about Josh's scheduled role in the fall 2008 rotation to Afghanistan. Having this dreaded event looming for two years takes its emotional tolls. By the time the departure date rolled around, half of me could not bear for him to go and half wanted him to just leave and get it over with. I was filled with pride, anxiety and fear all at once. I knew he was eager to do his job, but he didn't want to leave the family, either.

During those two

years before Josh left on tour, family planning became complicated. Josh and I had waited to start a family until after his first overseas tour. Our first child was born in January 2006, and, shortly after, we were told about the 2008 rotation. That news forced us to discuss when we hoped to have a second child. Could I be pregnant while he was overseas? Or should we wait until he returns? What if he doesn't return?

As it turned out, God took our plans into his own hands.

Our second child was born in May of 2008. Baby arrived two weeks early, so Josh — on a training exercise in Alberta — was not able to be present for the birth, but he was promptly flown home to be with me early the next morning. Again, I consider myself blessed as there are currently many expectant women whose deployed spouses will not be able to see their new blessing as quickly as my husband did. Our second son was four months old when his Daddy left.

On occasion I will hear, "I don't know how you do it. I couldn't." But neither could I, without God. I wonder how single parents, widows or other military families who do not have a personal relationship with God can cope. What is their source of comfort and strength? Do they have anything to cling to? My faith in his master plan and his abundant goodness allow me to endure the unknowns of each day. That does not mean that I am always a vision of peaceful acceptance. I have days when I wonder with fear about God's itinerary for us, especially when the day's news is not encouraging. Then I think of my sons growing up without their father,

and the possibility that I might lose my best friend. Those are the times when I doubt my ability to endure, and I need that reminder from God that he is with me.

I have found it exceptionally difficult to give my struggles fully over to him. When He is saying "Trust me, Sarah," I am thinking "But what if...," as if God is waiting for my feedback or approval. At home, whenever I hear a nearby car door slam, my heart pounds a bit harder for fear that there are military officials coming to my door with bad news. A telephone call displaying the local base number causes my hands to tremble for the same reason. I am reluctant to rest in his peace. Something in me hesitates to completely trust him, insisting that I must contribute.

During other uncertain times in my life, there always seemed to be something that I could do. I could put out more resumes, make more phone calls and improve my networking when searching for employment. I could read up on treatments and consult physicians during illness. Conflicts could be lessened or resolved through discussion. But I can do nothing to bring my husband home safely but pray. Throughout the various challenges this deployment brings, I am learning to rely more on him in prayer. Through what I used to think was solid confidence but is shaky doubt on my part, he encourages me to grow as his follower, and to realize that communication with him is integral. He patiently reminds me time and time again that he has always been faithful. He carries us all, and he will not take us home a single day before his plan allows. The certainty of his nature gives me hope.

The federal Veteran's Affairs Department states that Canada has officially fought in six wars.

Conflict	Canadians served	Canadians killed
Boer War	apx. 7,000	267
World War I	apx. 650,000	nearly 69,000
World War II	over 1,000,000	over 47,000
Korean War	26,800	516
Gulf War	apx. 4,500	0
War on Terror	over 2,500	107

Unofficially, we also participated in the Spanish Civil War and the Vietnam War, but those statistics are less clear. Furthermore, over 125,000 Canadians have volunteered in various NATO and UN peacekeeping missions over the years.



Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan engage in some target practice.

Perspective

Muslims desecularizing society

"Don't compare your ideals with other people's practices," said the speaker. "Compare a people's own ideals with their own practices."

This good advice came from a Muslim scholar's lecture on human rights last November at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. What was fascinating about the lecture was that I felt I was being included in a Muslim in-house discussion, and that discussion strangely paralleled conversations I have in my own Christian community.

The title was "When Politics of State Interfere with Human Rights," and the speaker was Tariq Ramadan – a Swiss-born scholar with positions at Oxford and a special Chair in "Identity and Citizenship" at Erasmus University in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. He has been called Islam's "Martin Luther" in the West and is driven to help Muslims faithfully accommodate to modern society.



Tariq Ramadan

Let me take a few points out of his lecture that especially struck me, each of which is closely related to the other.

Beyond "neutrality"

My ears perked up when I heard a critique of the "neutral" public sphere. His key line here was "what is dominant is normal, and what is normal is considered neutral by the dominant culture." For example, he said that church spires were a normal and thus "neutral" part of any European town's landscape for centuries. Now the minarets of mosques are considered to threaten this neutrality.

Another example is Muslim women who wear headscarves as a symbol of their religious identity. These small cuts of fabric have caused national governments to react as if on the defensive.

Ramadan pointed out that in March 2004 France banned headscarves from educational institutions because

they undermined the "neutrality" of the classroom. Ironically, anyone can wear "Coca-Cola" shirts without restriction.

In Belgium, they are much more enlightened. Students can wear headscarves, but *teachers* cannot, because teachers, representing the government, must appear "neutral."

Britain takes things one step further and allows everyone to wear headscarves. Only *what is taught* must be "neutral." This sounds like Ontario now.

His point is that the atmosphere, discourse and laws of a country, in their enforcement of zones of "neutrality," interfere with the human rights of committed religious people. These are not *special* rights, but the same rights as for other citizens. Even with regards to the implementation of Sharia law, Jewish and First Nation laws are already allowed to exist within the framework of national law. Why not parts of Islamic law, too?

It is interesting that arguments for Christian school funding can follow a similar line of thought.

Beyond us and them

A second thing that caught my attention was his contention that 9-11 has been over-rated in its significance. What is most important regarding the Muslim presence in the West is *the new visibility of a people previously hidden*. Radical Muslim terrorist activities intensify this and provoke a polarized discourse of mistrust and fear. But the larger reality is that a people previously unseen are now on the bus, in the hospital and in the news. An "us versus them" world can be easily provoked, a dichotomy perceived by both Muslims and non-Muslims.

This reminded me of my ancestors in Canada who contrasted themselves with the "Canadians," even comparing them to "Canaanites" in sermons. I've heard stories of Dutch immigrants who were treated with cold discrimination because of their language and their insistence on forming their own religious and educational institutions. Once you are seen, and seen as different, you

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman



can be branded as a threat.

Beyond victimhood

This requires a pro-active response on behalf of the newly visible crowd. Ramadan urged the Muslims present to avoid the victim mentality and not fall into the trap of minority discourse. "It isolates you," he explained, "and makes you appear to be asking for special treatment. Make clear that your diverse identity does not undermine the commonalities you have as citizens."

Come to the public as Canadians, not as Muslims first. Start with a "we," he advised, and "our" common ground: law, language, loyalty to country, and liberty. This is where conversation becomes fruitful.

I fully recognize Ramadan represents a moderate current in the Islamic ocean. What struck me, however, as I listened was how many committed Christians struggle with the same issues he was outlining in his lecture on government interference with human rights. Some Muslims may certainly be as fiery as Dutch immigrants who hoped to take Canada by storm in the sixties. The average Canadian Muslim, however, is wrestling with modernity just as we are – trying to practice faith without undue discrimination.

The advice I quoted at the beginning of this column struck me as Ramadan spoke. We ought to pay attention to the most reputable and scholarly Muslim voices in the world, just as we would want the Muslims to pay attention to credible, reflective Christian voices. Televangelists do not represent the Christian faith as accurately as Richard Mouw or the Pope. Making generalizations from worst cases is especially unproductive. If we want to live together with some degree of peace, finding some common concerns with people like Ramadan may be a constructive way forward. Call it the "hard work of love."

Peter Schuurman (eternalstudent@sympatico.ca) is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.



Farmer involvement badly needed in politics

Jenny Denhartog

It's no secret that the number of farmers in Ontario is dwindling. We now have 10,000 fewer farms in Ontario compared to a decade ago. A side effect of this trend is fewer farm leaders representing the farming community in the political arena, particularly at a time when the voice of farmers is badly needed.

Lack of farmer involvement is profoundly evident in the area of politics and public policy. Farm groups are continuously forced to combat political decisions that are clearly detrimental to the business of agriculture, a key economic driver in this province. At least some decisions made by our elected officials would never have passed the proposal stage if farmers had been part of the decision making body, thereby saving everyone the costly process of fighting, and hopefully reversing, the decision.

One example is the passing of Bill 50, which provides the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals with more powers than it previously held. The CFFO fully supports that animals need to be treated with a proper level of care. However, farmers were quick to point out that on-farm biosecurity and food safety protocols will be severely compromised when OSPCA officers are allowed to enter a property without a warrant. Most farmers would be able to tell you why such a breach of food safety measures should not be part of any legislation in today's society.

Another example is a local issue that is currently playing itself out in the Township of Wellington North. Township Council recently implemented new development charges on structures, including farm buildings. These charges will make it unaffordable for most farmers to expand or to replace livestock barns and other buildings. In the case of my own family's farm, the cost of replacing one of our barns would increase by roughly \$100,000 due to these development charges. Needless to say, I believe this decision will do nothing to enhance agriculture in this township. Development charges are meant to recover capital investment associated with new development. Had there been farmers on township council, they would have noticed that there are no such associated development costs for farm buildings. Local farm groups are now working together to try to get the decision reversed.

There are more examples, from inadequate compensation and protection methods against nuisance wildlife to burdensome regulations choking the life out of small rural businesses. They all show that the agricultural community isn't adequately represented in the political arena. The farm voice desperately needs to be heard at all levels of government.



Jenny Denhartog is the Field Services Associate of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario.

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Editorial

Trusting God in difficult times



Bert Witvoet

In a recent *Christianity Today* article entitled "The Greatest Social Need," the editors make the following observation: "The greatest social need in the world today is not HIV/AIDS outreach. It's not hunger. It's not global warming. Not ending poverty or eliminating malaria or tuberculosis. Not clean water. Not racial reconciliation. Not sexual trafficking. Not abortion. And it's not peace in the Middle East, and not even world peace." Instead, say the editors, the greatest social need is alienation from God. "The biblical picture is clear: the breakdown of society is rooted in the breakdown of our relationship with our Creator."

I'm not sure why the editors of *Christianity Today* call alienation from God a social need. "Social" usually refers to inter-human relationships. In a later statement the article does say, "Of course, this alienation is much more than a social problem. It is a fundamentally spiritual problem that constitutes humanity's greatest crisis: billions of men and women who do not know the love and grace of their Creator."

Maybe I'm quibbling about words. I can certainly agree that alienation from God is the greatest and deepest need that lies at the source of all the social ills yesterday, today and tomorrow. The *CT* article does not minimize the importance of all these problems nor does it suggest that Christians should stop focusing on alleviating poverty and eliminating racism. What it does do is remind us that we should not forget about addressing the root problem. The Western church as a whole has resorted to what *CT* calls "a myopic concern for the social [which] undermined the church's spiritual mission."

Justified by faith

I was reminded of this myopia when I meditated on Romans 4 the other day. It talks about justification by faith. The passage tells us that Abraham was a pretty decent fellow and that, if he wanted to, he could boast

about his social concerns, except that before God it was less than chicken feed. The only way Abraham could be reconciled with God was through his faith.

It seems so impractical to start talking about justification by faith. As if being set right with God can meet the social needs of our world. How do you connect this teaching of justification by faith to our society today anyway? It doesn't seem to fit the language and concern of our post-modern society. "Justification" is a legal term. It means that you are declared innocent. And justification by faith, not good deeds, seems out of kilter with our society where we are measured by what we do, not what we believe.

And then the Romans passage talks about "righteousness." What in the world is that about? I remember years ago stopping some people at a shopping mall and asking them what they thought righteousness means, until a store employee asked me to move on. But the answers I got were "totally righteous, dude." Nobody could tell me what "righteousness" really meant.

A shift in language

Yet for me personally, the passage in Romans speaks with such amazing clarity. I discovered that instead of saying that we are set right by faith, we could use the word "trust" instead of faith. Romans 4:5 gave me that clue: "However, to the person who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith [trust] is credited as righteousness. The thing about the word "trust" is that it is relational, whereas the word "faith" speaks more of a stance we take or a frame of mind we hold. Our post-modern society is hungry for relationships. Maybe when we talk more about trusting God rather than having faith, we communicate better what lies at the root of our social ills.

When relationships in a family are good, we learn to trust each other. A church community can also create circles of trust. Wherever there is trust, there is a feeling of safety and hope. And love is the cord that binds these people together. And all of this is a picture of who God is. God can be trusted. Why? Because he is faithful to his promises.

Stamp of approval

Abraham trusted God when God said that he would have a son even though he was about 100 years old. This trust in God was not easy to maintain in the face of many empirical facts. Abraham's body was "as good as dead," we read. And he did not have access to Viagra. But Abraham kept on trusting God. And God did not fail him. Not only did Abe get a son, through whom he would become the father of many nations, but he was judged to be okay in the eyes of God. Can't you just sense the surge of eternal life coursing through Abraham's veins when he knew that God approved of him, in spite of all his failures (he tried to save his own skin by pretending that Sarah was not his wife – the coward!). God judged him to be first rate because he trusted God.

What really occupies the minds of many people today is the economic downturn. In some quarters of the globe it is war and terrorism, AIDS, floods or drought. These are all empirical facts that stare us in the face. Maybe you can add your own personal list of hope-killers. In the midst all these social ills, is the message of trusting God not the most important one to bring? Put your trust in God, through his Son, Jesus Christ, and you can face all social ills with incomprehensible hope. I tell myself, "It's not the economy – it's the promises, stupid!"

Hope for the New Year

Peter VanHuizen (guest editor)

For teachers the New Year begins in September; but for most people it begins on January 1. For a few of us, it is the day we were born. Yes. I was a New Year's baby, the first child for my mother and father. I was conceived, it seems, less than two years after World War 2 ended. My father had spent three years in a war camp in Eastern Germany, made it out after the war, got married in February 1947, and had a baby within the first ten months. This was a tough time to be living, but not tough enough to inhibit the opportunity to have a baby.

As a matter of fact, having children in those days was seen as a sign of hope. My parents ended up having five more children, and they never for a minute considered children a "liability" as they looked to the future. My father died at the age of 61. On his tombstone we etched the words "Rejoice in your hope." My father was a godly man full of "hope." Speak to his children, and they are all sons and daughters who have "hope" embedded in their worldview and perhaps DNA.

This Christmas season I read Barak Obama's book, *The Audacity of Hope*. This is a very inspiring book for many reasons, but at its heart Obama affirms the importance of "hope." And he credits that in part to his Christian faith. I also read Brian McLaren's book, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope*. There you have it again – the word "Hope."

The Media's preoccupation with "gloom" and the current economic situation are causing a lot of stress for people. Teachers will see this stress in their community and in the prayer requests of their students. One of the tasks of a teacher is to provide their students with "hope." This is very easy to do, actually. Pray with the children and young people and let them know that God is sovereign. Tell them about the strength of living in community. Identify those things in their lives that ultimately matter – that they are loved and wanted, and that God has a plan for their lives.

Our parents, grandparents and historians can tell us stories of difficult times when God sustained his people. Those of us who have the privilege of seeing and working with people in less affluent parts of the world know that our Western materialist values and promises have led to a barren, anxiety-ridden population. Let's revisit the stories this year that inspire "hope." It begins with the story of a mother and father over two thousand years ago who welcomed a "baby" into the world.

Peter VanHuizen (Peter.VanHuizen@twu.ca) is the executive director of the Christian Teachers Association of B.C. This article appeared as an editorial in the CTABC Newsletter of January, 2009.

Christian Courier

Founded in 1945

An independent bimonthly that seeks to: report on significant events in the Christian community and the world; express opinions infused by Scripture and rooted in a Reformed perspective; provide contact for the Christian community.

EDITORIAL TEAM & PRODUCTION STAFF

Op-Ed Editor: Bert Witvoet bert.witvoet@sympatico.ca
News Editor: Angela Reitsma Bick angela@christiancourier.ca
Feature Editor: Brett Alan Dewing brett@christiancourier.ca
Church Page Editor: Marion Van Til marianvantil@roadrunner.com
Contributing Editor: Peter Schuurman eternalstudent@sympatico.ca
Circulation/Fam.ads: Rose der Nederlanden rose@christiancourier.ca
Admin/Bus.ads/Web: Ineke Medcalf-Strayer ads@christiancourier.ca

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Christian Courier

5 Joanna Dr, St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1

Tel: (905) 682-8311; 1-800-969-4838

Web site: www.christiancourier.ca

Publications Mail Registration No. 09375

We acknowledge the assistance of the Government of Canada, through the Publications Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

Canada

News/Research

Work Research Foundation becomes Cardus

HAMILTON, January 12, 2009 – Cardus, North America's newest non-partisan think tank, formally announced its launch. "Research specialists in the interactions of economic, social, cultural, intellectual and religious spheres of public life, Cardus will expand upon the work of its precursor, the Work Research Foundation," said President Michael Van Pelt.

"We have grown as an organization by 30 per cent per year over the last five years," said Van Pelt. "It had become clear that the old structure was no longer capable of sustaining either our growth or our aspirations."

The Cardus mandate is to rethink, research and contribute to rebuilding an integrated vision of North American social architecture. "We are an ideas-driven organization with a core belief in the possibility of meaningful change through applied research," said Van Pelt, adding that in the past year the organization has made some significant and diverse additions to its list of Senior Fellows.

The "cardus" was an ancient north-south road that connected the people of Roman cities to their major public spaces. On the Cardus Maximus, governments, markets, temples and other cultural institutions lived and worked to build a common life for the common good.

"Today's North American cities," said Van Pelt, "are connected by rails, airports, highways and complex digital networks." "Global culture generates a huge amount of data, but research is needed to understand how this influences politics, law, work, art, media and education," Van Pelt said, noting that these are the areas in which Cardus specializes. "This is particularly necessary," he added, "given the transformation of modern societies from an industrial to a technological era."

Director of Research Ray Pennings stressed that filling this gap is essential to ensure that public life is sustained not just by social or political effort, but by informed institutional cooperation. Cardus has contributed original research through projects such as the Stained Glass Urbanism, which explores the role that traditional faith institutions play in local neighbourhoods and communities.

"Whatever policy makers or politicians might think of churches at a personal level, as part of the social fabric of healthy communities, faith-groups are absolutely vital," says Van Pelt.

"The Cardus team of researchers and Senior Fellows is committed to building the public conversation on social architecture in the 21st Century based on sound research and intellectual rigour," said Pennings.

Compass Creative (www.compasscreative.ca), a Burlington design agency, was selected to work with Cardus on the rebrand concept and the final rollout of the new organizational identity.

I study wheel-running in rats

I have spent at least the last 20 years as a research psychologist studying wheel running in rats. If you have had a pet gerbil, hamster, or rat, you know how much these rodents use their wheels, especially at night. As a Christian, I want to suggest that my years as a behavioural neuroscientist studying the running of rats running is a responsible use of the gifts that our Father has given me.

Christians who pursue the study of psychology tend to focus on its social or clinical aspects. They want to help people. This desire is honourable – one that fulfils the command to love our neighbour. We should thank our God for these people, as they often are overworked and underpaid. In this age, support networks need to be maintained and strengthened, and Christians have an important role to play in this work. After my undergraduate education, I myself spent three years working with homeless men in Montreal as a deacon-evangelist. Why then do I now study wheel-running in rats?

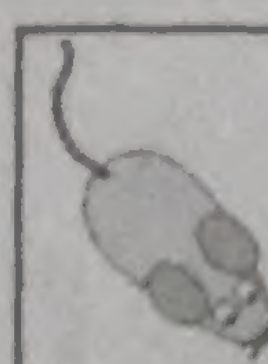
Addictive running

Let me tell you a fact about running in rats that partially explains my interest – and may spark yours. If introduced to a cage with a running wheel, rats will initially run about 1000 wheel turns a day; over a few weeks their running increases to more than 5000 to 7000 wheel turns a day – over seven kilometres daily (one wheel turn is a little more than a metre). I believe that this aspect of the rat's behaviour has relevance to the human problem of addiction. Before making the connections, however, let me justify in biblical terms my conviction that animal research can speak to human psychological concerns.

Christians quite rightly have a high view of the place of humans in creation. We draw a line in the sand between animals and humans: we are made in God's image; animals are not.

Similarities

However, there are a number of threads in Scripture that connect us intimately with animals. We were created on the same day as the animals; we did not get our own day (and thus an eight-day week). Further, the narrative of naming in Genesis 2 implies that the animals could potentially provide a partner for Adam. I also see a remarkable analogy between humans and animals implied in Luke 8, in the passage in which Jesus casts out a legion of demons from the Gerasene man. The demons beg Jesus to send them not into the Abyss but into a herd of pigs. It is not clear why having a "host" is desired by the demons, but their plea suggests to me that humans and pigs are similar enough that these demons prefer pigs to the alternative. While this passage raises many questions, it strongly supports the notion that I can learn things about human mental disorders from using animal models.



From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom

If we want to know how humans are different from animals, I would suggest we start with our unique responsibility to rule – a role that mirrors one way to define God – he is Lord. Being made in God's image means that we are different from animals based on the task given us, not on our physical nature. If this is our starting point, we need not be concerned when neuroscientists continue to discover similarities across human and animal brain systems. Thus I look for solutions to human problems in rats.

One human health problem is addiction – whether to drugs and alcohol, gambling, or computer games. It sometimes seems that this is a problem of the will: if we would just stop smoking, then things would get better. But anyone who has tried to stop smoking, or watched someone try, knows that addiction has an insidious ability to undermine our resolve to stop. People are intellectually aware of having a problem but seem unable to do anything to resolve it. The resources available to help these people are very limited, and they will continue to be inadequate until we gain a better understanding of addiction.

Ethical possibilities

When I worked with homeless men in Montreal, I came face-to-face with a great deal of alcoholism. I went back to school because I wanted to learn more about the causes of alcoholism and other such disorders, their progression, and how they can be prevented or treated. Animal models permit us to look at these issues in ways that are ethically impossible in humans. While we are clearly more complex and in many ways a higher creation of God, it is evident that our biology significantly parallels that of rats.

My students and I are looking at running in rats as a model of non-drug addiction, because seven kilometres of running (largely at night, the rat's active period) is clearly excessive. We are comparing this behaviour to drug addiction in other animal models, such as drug taking in rats. When connected to an intravenous drug line, rats will work hard to get their cocaine. In many ways, their self-administration of cocaine is similar to the excessive wheel running of their siblings. As we come to understand more about wheel running in rats, we are also comparing it to human non-drug addictions, like pathological gambling, in the hopes that our rat model will help us understand the puzzling human problem of addiction.

Scientific knowledge advances in small steps, and I pray that my research will help us to address complex human problems. I would be pleased to provide some small part to a solution. The point at which I tackle addiction is further back than the clinical frontline many have chosen, but this pre-clinical work is essential if people are to be helped. I feel called by my God to be a behavioural neuroscientist addressing serious human psychological problems by studying wheel running in rats.

Rudy Eikelboom (reilboom@wlu.ca) is associate professor of psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario.



The rat race

According to Wikipedia, "a **rat race** is a term used for an endless, self-defeating or pointless pursuit. It conjures up the image of the futile efforts of a lab rat trying to escape whilst running around a maze or in a wheel."

Work in our modern society is often referred to as a rat race. Blessed are they whose work experience is not endless and pointless.

What do rats say when they see us humans running around like chickens with their heads cut off? "The human race"?

BW

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Address all correspondence to: 5 Joanna Dr, St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1
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PRINTED IN CANADA



Viewpoint

The thirsty rock of the middle east

A story of a conversation, a crisis and a question

Sam Townsend

"How have I ignored this situation?" Lynne Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago asked last October in Amman, Jordan, about the growing danger the Middle Eastern Church faces. She was attending Sounds of Hope, a conference of church leaders from both sides of the Atlantic about the crises facing Middle Eastern Christians, issues that Westerners have too long ignored and, at times, perpetuated.



Lynne Hybels

In the middle of the Middle Eastern conflict remains a hurting outpost of believers. In Iraq, Christians flee from slaughter, cutting the number of believers there in half... and then in half again (see Madany's article on page 1). In Palestine, Christians struggle for their rights, and they struggle to forgive. In Israel, Messianic Jews fight to overcome stereotypes of Arab believers. And across the sea, a "Christian nation" is too often ignoring and too often misinterpreting the events taking place in the cradle of Christianity.

Those who came to listen had no shortage of sights,

facts and heartbreaking stories to take in. Dr. Bishara Awad is the founder of Bethlehem Bible College in Israel, an institution focused on raising up Christian leaders in the Middle East. He opened his session by briefly telling a story that defined his life. At age 9, he helped his mother drag a limp body to their kitchen. The wound in the man's forehead made plain the truth that he had been hit and killed in the Israeli crossfire. The man was Awad's father. But in the years to follow, his widowed mother taught him not to seek revenge but, instead, to forgive.

It is a unique story, because in the Middle East, forgiveness is far from the minds of most. Palestinians are being driven from their land and are exchanging their thrown rocks with bullets from Israeli troops. And in return for bullets,



Muslim extremists are building bombs. And westerners are seeing bombs on the news and assuming they know everything about Islam.

But Dr. Nabeel Jabbour, an author and teacher, says there is much more to Islam than hijackings and jihad. He explained that Muslims fit into several categories, from the secular, non-practicing bunch all the way to the extremist sect, but many fall in between. Ultimately, his message was that Christians must view Muslims as individuals in need of salvation. If Christians treat Muslims as enemies, said Jabour, "it will no longer be the Great Commission, it will be the Great Omission."

For Palestinians – Muslim and Christian – "omission" is a painful word. The Zionist movement has taught Americans and Christians to throw their weight uncritically behind the Jewish people in support of the Israeli state that many believe will fulfill biblical prophecy. Some Zionists believe Jews are heirs of salvation simply through heritage and are exempt from the need of redemption through Jesus Christ's sacrifice.

Author and educator Rev. Colin Chapman says Christians must have other priorities than the reoccupation of the Jews in Israel. "Our message to the Jewish people must be that it is in the person of Jesus the Messiah that their hopes have been fulfilled, not in their return to the land and in the creation of the state of Israel," he said. "When I see how Jesus has already fulfilled so many of the hopes and dreams of Israel in the Old Testament I can see how... the followers of Jesus today can... both hunger and thirst after righteousness, justice and be genuine peacemakers in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

But peacemaking is a difficult thing. America has played no small role in supporting Israel's return to the land of their heritage. In doing so, however, they have displaced the Palestinian people, making their land allotment as diminutive as their rights. In one discussion at the Sounds of Hope conference, this dislodgment of the Palestinian people from the land they had occupied for centuries was compared to the injustices colonials dealt the Native Americans.

Bakke shared a conversation he had once had with a Jewish Rabbi. He had asked the Rabbi about the current state of the Israeli nation from a theological perspective. The Rabbi replied, "Every people, to be a whole people, must somewhere in their history be stewards of power. We Jews have always been victims of power. The state of Israel is our first opportunity to be stewards of power." Then with a big tear rolling down his cheek, he



If I were a chickadee

If I were a chickadee...

I'd be a classical chickadee. My nest entrance would be a perfect circle.

I'd be a Dutch chickadee. My nest would be lined with soft lichens, like an old man's beard – a neatly placed, *clean* old man's beard. If I couldn't find enough lichens, I'd use anything fine and soft. Something "pretty" would be nice. I'd use pink insulation if I could find it. If the young complained about the itch, I'd tell them it builds character.

I'd be a physically-fit chickadee. I'd practice quick stops and starts, hanging upside down from twigs, and flitting between branches.

I'd be a social-justice chickadee. When I'd spot a pygmy owl, or sharp-shinned hawk in a tree – a safe tree with many twigs and branches – I'd mobilize a social justice committee and protest, protest, protest against the aggressor.

I'd be an intelligent chickadee. My brain mass would actually grow towards winter to keep track of all the seeds I'd cache, preparing for a rainy, snowy, sleety, or other kind of day.

I'd be a greedy chickadee with Wall Street instincts. When I discovered some other chickadee's cache of seeds, I'd remove a seed and put it to work, making for a vibrant sunflower-seed economy. I'd invest others' seeds for them.

I'd be a cautious chickadee. No matter how fit I was, I'd check six ways before flying across an open field, lawn, or pavement. I'd teach my children to be scared silly of the following words: *shrike*, *hawk*, *owl*, and *cat*.

I'd be a chickadee friend for landowners who aren't too neat themselves. I'd write *dee-dee*-odes for landowners who mix shrubbery with lawn, woodlot with pasture, fence-line with crop field. I'd sing *dee-dee*-psalms for those who leave dead branches and stubs on their property. I'd thank human care-takers who do these things with a careful inspection of their



living shrubs and trees. I'd remove (actually, I'd *eat*) aphid colonies and overwintering eggs for free.

I'd be a sunlight-activated chickadee. My pituitary gland would register the change of seasons, and I'd get recharged. I'd start to sing "*spring's-here*" on cold but bright January mornings. And I'd be a duplicitous chickadee, convincing my human neighbours that I was trying to cheer them up when it is really just my hormones pumping into chickadee-overdrive.

If I were a chickadee...

I'd be.

My wife, seeing the title and little else on the page, suggested: "If you were a chickadee you'd make lots of noise, investigate everything (including things not your business), hurry and twitch all day long, drive people crazy, and be cute." (She is quite a perceptive husband-watcher. I'm on her life-list.)

Curt Gesch (curtgsch@hotmail.com) is not really a chickadee. Last time we checked, he was teaching students at Houston Christian School when he's not building gates and sidewalks with wooden palets.



Flowers & Thistles

Curt Gesch

Stewardship

concluded, "If God is just, he will have to remove us one more time for what we have done to the Palestinians in this land. We are treating them the way the Nazis treated us."

Perhaps Armenian Orthodox Archbishop Mar Avak Asadorian of Iraq summed up the urgency of the Middle East crises best: "If the present state of affair continues in the region of the Middle East and Iraq, then the Eastern manifestation of the Christian Church – the churches that saw the birth of the Lord and worshiped him in his own tongue, giving millions of martyrs throughout 2,000 years – yes, these churches, are already at peril. [This is] a matter not to be taken lightly, otherwise we are going to lose the Eastern manifestation of the Christian Church."

It was a call for help that some hadn't heard before. "How have I ignored this situation?" Hybels asked at the close of the conference.

"What's happened this week is that I've seen the pain ... I've heard the anger. I think Christians and the Church in the West have really betrayed [the Middle East Church] by our lack of concern, by supporting global policies that have very much hurt the Middle East as a whole and our Christian brothers and sisters here."

What was apparent to Hybels was apparent to many at the conference that week: As basic as water to an impervious city is unity and support within the global Body of believers. Just as the Middle East Church needs the support and prayers of the western Church, the West needs the cradle of Christianity to be a beacon of God's faithfulness to a broken people.

Fifty westerners went home after the Sounds of Hope conference to share with others what they had heard and seen in the hopes of helping them understand the urgency of the situation. But after all the speeches, the discussions, the sharing, the question Hybels left lingering at the end of an interview is, perhaps, the question that would most



Amman, Jordan

Good-byes

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot...a time to embrace and a time to refrain.... [Ecclesiastes 3: 1, 2, 5b].

It is a time of uprooting for Edith and me as we prepare to leave Cambridge for Cambodia. At the moment we feel quite uprooted – but things are starting to fall into place as our departure date draws nearer.

Change is a part of living and especially a part of living a Christian life. God is not satisfied with the "status quo" – which is why he sent his son in the first place. So we as Christians follow the lead of our Saviour and are commissioned to make a difference for Christ wherever we serve – whether in Canada or Cambodia. We are people committed to a mission that involves change!

A blessing

But change and good-byes are difficult. The word "goodbye" has its roots in the phrase "God by with ye." So it is actually a phrase of blessing and reminds me of the greeting Boaz and his workers used in Ruth 2:4: "...Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, 'The Lord be with you!' 'The Lord bless you!' they called back."

So it is with a heartfelt sense of blessing that I say goodbye to you, the faithful readers of this column. It has been my privilege to reflect with you twice a month on stewardship issues. It has also been my privilege to spend over seven years in fulltime service with Christian Stewardship Services and the Christian Reformed Church. I tried to help leaders in congregations engage members in faithful stewardship of their gifts of time, talents, homes, businesses, farms, money and possessions for the Kingdom. Helping people to become more intentional about their stewardship has been the overarching theme of my efforts these past seven and half years. I do hope and pray that these efforts and this column may have encouraged you in your stewardship. It is my hope and prayer as I leave this position that the Lord may bless you in your stewardship.

Good-byes are difficult because it means leaving people you love behind. Yet the weight of that parting is not what it used to be. With the communication services available today and the prospect of an annual visit to Canada, the parting is not nearly as daunting as it was, for instance, for my parents in 1953 when they immigrated to Canada. Yet the opportunity to slip over and help with baby-sitting grandchildren or with a home repair or renovation for any of our children is something we will have to miss.

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick DeGraaf

Our future visits will be fewer but will likely be more intense.

The other side of the goodbye is the "hello" or "hi" at the other end. These greetings do not seem to have any special root meaning that originates in blessing – at least, not according to my desk dictionary. However, I know we will be warmly received and embraced by the CRWRC team in Cambodia whom we had the privilege of meeting in November when we were there on a short-term assignment with CRWRC. We look forward to serving and facing the challenges of working in Cambodia – working with so many who suffer under poverty, are victims of injustice, or are affected by the devastation caused by typhoons and flooding. It is a blessing to work with a team of expatriates and Cambodian Christians who are devoted to Micah 5:8b: "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Having worked in Bangladesh previously, Edith and I know we can't possibly do this on our own. But our calling to go is solid and sure, and we need to daily seek God's guidance in our work. It is our dependence on God's grace that makes us able, and that is why the blessing, "the good-byes" of God's people are so important to us. We need God to bless us, and, in turn, we hope and pray that God may also bless you and enable you to be a blessing wherever and to whomever you serve!

I thank you for your interest in this column. The Lord bless you and keep you!

Stewardly tip: Greetings count: We do not know what the future holds, so we want to be sure that we bless each other when we say our good-byes. It may be our last – only God knows. Take the time to part with a sincere word of greeting. Verbal and touch communication is so important to our well-being. It is part of being family and caring for each other. I am my brother's keeper, and that is good stewardship!

Readers: Share your "Stewardly tips" so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.



Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario. Rick's email: rickd@csservices.ca



help in the Middle East Church's crises if many more were to ask it in one voice: "What is mine to do now?"

Sam Townsend works for Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding, which sponsored the Sounds of Hope conference.

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Church

At 500, John Calvin is the subject of Calvin College lecture to kick-off 'January Series'

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — (CRCNA) Reformer John Calvin was born 500 years ago, July 10, 1509. That anniversary will be celebrated around the world this year.

Calvin believed in a separation between church and state but not a separation between religion and politics, said John Witte, Jr., on January 7 during the opening presentation the annual "January Series" at the Christian Reformed Church-related college named for the Reformer. Witte's talk was called "Separation of Church and State — Calvin Style: A 500th Anniversary Celebration."



John Witte, Jr

"For Calvin it was the responsibility of the church and state to protect and promote the law and liberty of Geneva (where Calvin served for many years)," said Witte, a law professor at Emory

University. "And, in turn, it was Geneva's commitment to the rule of law and regime of liberty that allowed church and state to separate and yet cooperate in the governance of a Christian republic."

Witte said it makes sense to begin the North American celebration of John Calvin's 500th birthday in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and particularly at Calvin College. "No institution has done more to preserve and enhance the legacy of this great Genevan reformer," Witte asserted.

After sketching the many changes instituted by Calvin, such as placing the pulpit above the altar and making the Bible more accessible to ordinary people, Witte said the Calvinist approach has thrived for five centuries because of a "relentless program of teaching and preaching, publication and education, discipline and charity."

Christian youth prepare for cyber-missions trip

(ChristianPost) — Dozens of churches around the world are planning to participate in a special kind of missions "trip" that involves bringing Christ and his message to a huge community where the Gospel is not the most popular subject: young Internet surfers.

So far, nearly 2,000 teens have signed up for the "Online Missions Trip" to bombard popular social networking sites with stories about God.

"This is a two-week opportunity for all of us to bombard Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Twitter, whatever social places you go to online, with the Gospel of Jesus Christ," explain the youth pastor at Alexandria Covenant Church in Alexandria, Minnesota, and the organizer of the missions trip, Tim Schomoyer, in a promotional video.

From February 1-14, students from the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, Bermuda and elsewhere will use the power of the internet to share Christ with people not only on the other side of the world but across the street and with friends in their school.

Pre-trip training on how to effectively get messages about Christ out using social networks began on Sunday and will continue until January 31.

Face-to-face is the goal

During the outreach, participants will upload videos and photos, post links and use status updates to share what God is doing in their lives. Participants will also write notes,



send messages, post blogs, create invitations to their youth group and do other things that will help bring God up in a conversation online.

Online conversations, however, are only the initial step. The goal is to eventually lead people into face-to-face discussions. Outreach events and new-believer follow-ups will start on February 15 and will include a free four-part series from Lifechurch.tv, entitled "What's Next?"

"Afterwards, you'll have maybe some events you'll be using, like events in Facebook to invite your friends to come to small groups or youth groups," says Schomoyer.

The Alexandria Covenant Church young people, for example, will be using the youth curriculum "Gospel Journey Maui" by the popular youth ministry Dare 2 Share. They will send invitations to a large number of other young people in their area to discuss what Christians believe and why, as well as what other faiths believe. See <www.onlinemissionstrip.com>.

First Things founder Richard John Neuhaus dies at 72

Marian Van Til

NEW YORK — Rev. Richard John Neuhaus, the influential Catholic intellectual, theologian, author and founder of the journal *First Things*, died on January 7 at age 72 from complications of cancer. Neuhaus was born in Pembroke, Ontario, but spent most of his life in the U.S.



Neuhaus was one of the U.S.'s most influential Catholic conservatives, though he grew up Lutheran and his father was a Lutheran pastor. He never married and became a Catholic priest at age 54. In the 1960s he was actively involved in social justice issues, marching with Dr. Martin Luther King and protesting the Vietnam war. Gradually his opposition to abortion and active homosexuality moved him to embrace Roman Catholicism.

He spent time as a parish priest but founded *First Things* in 1990 and came to prominence as a thinker, writer and speaker. *First Things* is published by the Institute on Religion and Public Life, an "interreligious, nonpartisan research and education institute" which Neuhaus founded "to advance a religiously informed public philosophy for the ordering of society." A major way it does that is via *First Things*. *First Things* refers to itself as "The Journal of Religion, Culture and Public Life."

Four years earlier Neuhaus had written a watershed book, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*. His thesis was that the "faith of persons and communities must be more compellingly related to the public arena." The "naked public square," that is, one void of religious and moral values, will almost certainly result in the death of democracy, he said.

He and his prominent writers fleshed out that thinking every month in *First Things*.

Rev. George Rutler, a friend of Neuhaus's and a fellow New York City priest told *Christianity Today*, "Father Neuhaus elevated the debate about secular culture by showing that theological considerations engage the highest science of the mind, and are not cultural asides. *First Things*, and Neuhaus' monthly column, 'The Public Square,' 'gave us a frame of reference for talking about the marginalization of the eternal verities,' Rutler said.

Neuhaus was also a key figure behind the ecumenical initiative *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*.

California court ruling may impact future church property fights

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (RNS) — The Episcopal Church claimed an important legal victory early this month when California's Supreme Court ruled that parishes do not have the right to keep church property if they secede from the national denomination.

The Episcopal Church holds that local parish property is held in trust for regional dioceses and the national church. California's Supreme Court has now agreed.

While the decision technically applies to only one church in one state — St. James Church in Newport Beach, Calif. — Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori asserted that the California high court's "unequivocal reasoning applies generally through the Episcopal Church." She added, "We are hopeful that this decision will help bring remaining property litigation in California and elsewhere to a speedy conclusion."

Episcopal leaders also hope that Monday's ruling will chill enthusiasm for a new, rival church in North America for dissident conservatives that was launched in early December.

Missing the point

But those who have left for biblical reasons say that those Episcopal leaders are missing the point about why they left, and why others will leave in the future. Rev. Peter Frank, spokesperson for the newly formed Anglican Church in North America, put it this way, "People that have made the choice to be mainstream Anglicans are unlikely to be sued back into a group they disagree with just because a panel of judges tells them they don't actually own the candlesticks on the altar."

A statement from St. James signaled that "the battle is far

from over" and lawyers are considering a possible appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. Two other breakaway parishes had put their property claims on hold and are also affected by the decision at St. James.

The court's ruling may have an immediate impact on the denomination's legal battle with the Fresno-based Diocese of San Joaquin, which seceded from the Episcopal Church in 2007 and aims to keep more than 30 church properties in its possession.

The ruling may ripple across church and state lines as well, according to legal scholars, bolstering denominations locked in similar battles, such as the United Methodist Church and Presbyterian Church (USA), both of which filed briefs supporting the Episcopal Church.

Church

Sudan update: Hope lingers, but war is threatening

KHARTOUM, Sudan (RLPB) – Much bloodshed in Sudan has hinged on the fact that in 1983 President Numayri violated the 1972 Addis Ababa peace accord by decreeing that Sharia (Islamic) Law would be implemented across the whole country.

This led to the resumption of the civil war between the minority Islamist Arab-dominated government of Sudan in the north and the African non-Muslim (predominantly Christian) south.

For more than 20 years the southern “rebels” resisted Islamization and Arabization despite the government’s aerial bombardments and raids by jihadist paramilitaries, as well as government-caused famine and a massive slavery industry. The war ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005.

Southern leader Dr. John Garang had a vision for a new Sudan, one in which all of the country – not just the south – would be liberated, and all Sudanese, irrespective of race or religion, would be free and equal.

Peace agreement still not implemented

In pursuit of this vision Garang sought to unite all Sudan’s various opposition groups to remove the repressive regime from power through democratic elections. The only way to get most southerners to the table was to offer them a referendum on separation and independence. While the peace agreement provided for a referendum, which is to be held in 2011, Dr. Garang’s hope was that over the six years from 2005 until then, the situation could be turned around through elections slated for this year. He hoped that the result would be equity and liberty for the Sudanese Southerners and of Sudan’s marginalized and persecuted peoples.

But only months after the peace agreement was signed, John Garang died in a mysterious plane crash. In the years since, the Arab-Islamist ruling National Congress Party (NCP) in Khartoum has stalled on implementing the peace agreement, leading the Southerners to threaten separation and the Islamist regime to threaten jihad. (The north will never let the south separate from Sudan, as all Sudan’s oil is in the south.)

However, over recent months southern leaders have re-embraced Dr Garang’s “New Sudan” vision. The National Congress Party runs a minority government which can be toppled in elections if there is unity among the opposition. The Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM) is working towards making this unity a reality. The NCP knows it cannot win against a united opposition and is expected to seek to divide peoples and scuttle the elections, possibly through escalating conflict.

Troops poised to strike

Oil-rich South Kordofan (Nuba Mountains) is a transitional region that lies between northern and southern Sudan, and whose peoples were allies of the south during the 21 years of civil war. The region has long been terrorized by jihadists from the north. In violation of the CPA, the government has recently been deploying thousands of troops to South Kordofan, allegedly to counter Darfuri rebels, who Khartoum claims are planning to stake a claim there for leverage in peace talks. The peace agreement calls for any defensive action to be taken by Joint Integrated Units, not northern forces.

Tensions are high, and rising. If war erupts in South Kordofan observers say it could be very difficult to contain, and would likely scuttle the 2009 elections. Sudanese Christians are asking Christians worldwide to pray for Sudan and its liberation, which would allow freedom of worship.

Protect Christians or step down, India’s top court instructs officials in Orissa

NEW DELHI (CWNews.com) – In a searing criticism of the Hindu-nationalist government leadership in Orissa, India’s top federal court has said that state leaders should resign if they cannot stop violence against the Christian minority there that has gone on for months.

“We will not accept the persecution of minority. If the state government is unable to protect them, it should resign,” declared the federal court. The court was responding to a petition for protection entered by Archbishop Raphael Cheenath of Bhubaneswar. The petition cited the lack of security especially in the Kandhamal district, where thousands of Christians have fled from their homes to escape roaming Hindu mobs.

“It is the duty of the state government to protect the minority community,” the federal court stated. Addressing their criticism directly to government leaders, the judges said that officials in Orissa had offered protection to

Christians “only after 50,000 people of the minority community fled to the jungles.”

The orchestrated violence against Christians in Kandhamal was let loose by Hindu groups after the murder of Swami Lakshmanananda Saraswati, the foremost figure among the Hindu nationalist groups in Orissa. Saraswati was shot dead on August 23 last year.

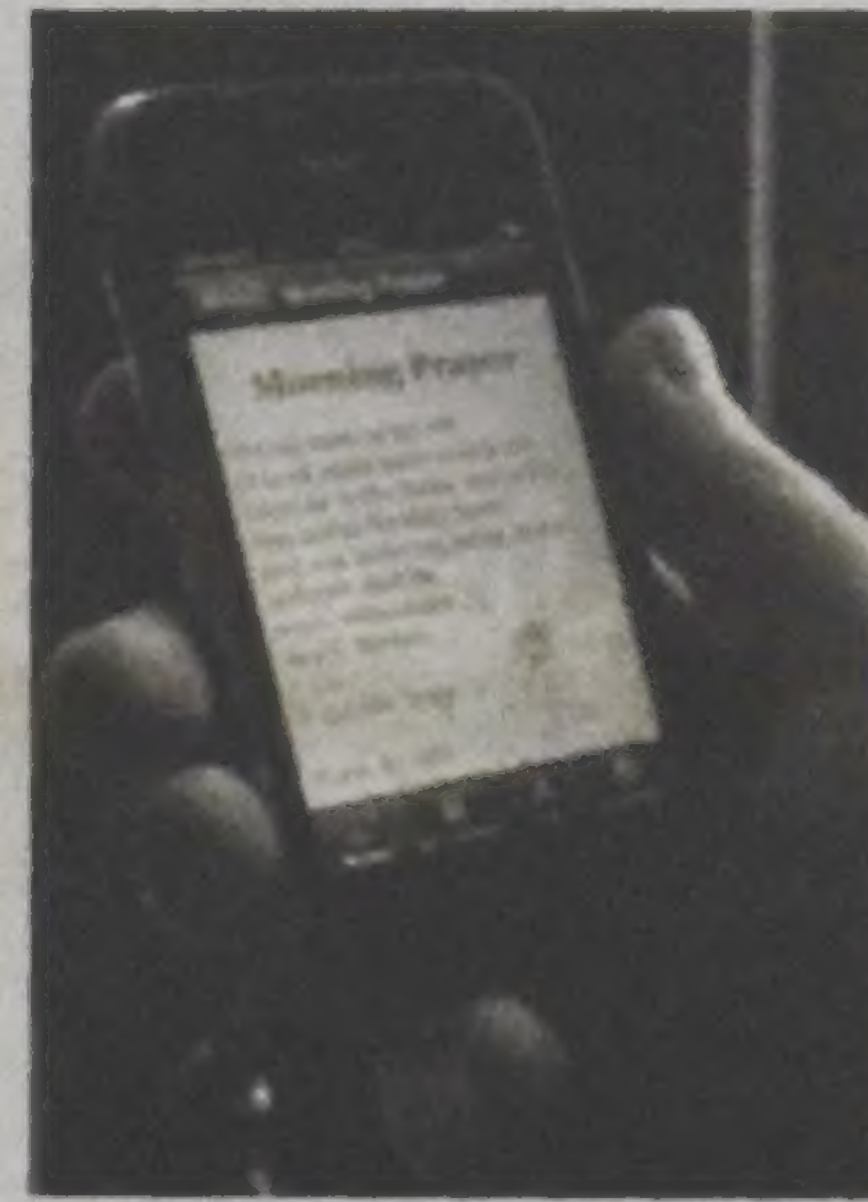
Although Maoist rebels claimed responsibility for the murder, Hindu groups said the murder of the Hindu leader was a Christian conspiracy. In the aftermath of the killing, Hindu mobs attacked Christians in dozens of locations over a period of weeks, with local police doing little to curb the violence. More than 70 Christians were killed, and over 6,000 homes looted or destroyed along with 200 churches. Roughly half of the 100,000 Christians in the Kandhamal district were driven from their homes.

Ancient liturgy available via state-of-the-art technology

Marian Van Til

ROME – A 35-year-old Italian priest has put together a digital version of the Breviary, the ancient Catholic book of daily prayers. Father Paolo Padrini earned the moniker “techno-priest” from the Associated Press after compiling his i-Breviary, whose contents are now available for download in Apple Computer’s i-Tunes store at i-Tunes.com. The application costs € 0.79 (\$1.26CAD), while upgrades will be free. Padrini’s proceeds are going to charity.

The electronic Breviary provides the daily readings for



the Catholic Mass, prayers of the hours and other prayers. I-Breviary is available in Italian, English, Spanish, French and Latin. There are plans for audio accompaniments – Gregorian chant – as well as additional prayers. Fr. Paolo also runs a popular website called *Passi nel deserto* (“Steps in the Desert”).

The i-Breviary has earned the Vatican’s approval. Last month Msgr. Paul Tighe, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, praised it, noting that the church “is learning to use the new technologies primarily as a tool or as a means of evangelizing, as a way of being able to share its [Christian] message with the world.”

Pope Benedict, a classical music lover and competent amateur musician was reportedly given an iPod in 2006. He has sought to reach out to young people through new media.

Birth control pill a ‘demographic catastrophe’ says pill’s co-inventor

ROME (CathNews) – Eighty-five-year-old Carl Djerassi, the Austrian chemist who helped invent the contraceptive pill, now says that his co-creation has led to a “demographic catastrophe.” Djerassi was one of three chemists whose formulation of the synthetic progestogen Norethisterone marked a key step toward the earliest oral contraceptive pill.

In the Austrian paper *Der Standard*, Djerassi recently outlined the “horror scenario” that has occurred because of the population imbalance, for which his invention was partly to blame. He said that in most of Europe there was now “no connection at all between sexuality and reproduction. This divide in Catholic Austria, a country which has on average 1.4 children per family, is now complete.” He described families who had decided against reproduction as “wanting to enjoy their schnitzels while leaving the rest of the world to get on with it.” Djerassi is himself a Catholic.

The fall in the birth rate, Djerassi said, is an “epidemic” far worse, but given less attention, than obesity. Young Austrians are committing national suicide if they fail to procreate.

Austrian Cardinal Christoph Schonborn told an interviewer that the Vatican had forecast 40 years ago that the pill would lead to a dramatic fall in the birth rate in the west. “Somebody above suspicion like Carl Djerassi ... is saying that each family has to produce three children to maintain population levels, but we’re far away from that,” he said.



Carl Djerassi

he viewed it negatively as a “cold shower.” But he said he had altered his views as, over time. It has proved “prophetic.”

Environmental hazard too

Angelo Bonelli, of the Italian Green party, said it was the first he had heard of a link between the pill and environmental pollution. The worst of poisons were to be found in the water supply. “It strikes me as idiosyncratic to be worried about this,” he said.

But Dr. Jose Maria Simon Castellvi of Spain is just one of many experts who have pointed to the “devastating ecological effects of the tons of hormones discarded into the environment each year. We have sufficient data to state that one of the causes of masculine infertility in the West is the environmental contamination caused by the products of ‘the pill.’” Castellvi noted as well that the International Agency for Research on Cancer reported in 2005 that the pill has carcinogenic effects.

Schonborn told Austrian TV that when he first read Pope Paul VI’s 1968 encyclical condemning artificial contraception

Grief

Farewell, my son



Coby Veenstra

It was February 2, 2007. I was sitting next to my son's bed in my living room. A boys' choir was singing softly. For the first time that day, my son was free of the hallucinations that had plagued him for the last two days, and he lay, quietly, listening. Then a boy's treble began to sing softly, "Going home; going home; I am going home." I asked my son, "Do you hear

what they're singing?" He nodded. I told him, "Why don't you do what they're singing. Stop fighting and just go Home and rest." Not twenty minutes later, he went Home, and I couldn't help repeating the words the choir boy had just sung: "Real life has begun." So came to an end my son's life here on earth and his "real life" began.

Len

As a little boy, Len was quiet, thoughtful, very shy, and not very sure of himself. Because of that, he had few friends, especially as he grew to manhood. Len loved the Lord passionately and constantly questioned if things were biblical or not. In the last years of his life, Len had been a church janitor. I seriously doubt there are many janitors so loved by the youth and the kids as Len was. They came to him and talked to him, and he gave to them all, generously, of his love.

One day I noticed that his face was stiff and shooed him to his doctor. The verdict: Bell's Palsy. A year later some ear problems sent him to the doctor again. This time a terrible discovery was made. A tumor that had started in his parotid gland (where mumps happens) had worked its way through his ear and into his head. The diagnosis: no cure! I and many others pleaded for a miracle – the miracle of healing. A series of masses were said on his behalf in a church in Ireland. Many Muslims from the Markham Road mosque said prayers for him, as did many churches and families in the area. God granted us a miracle; but not the miracle we asked for. It became an even greater one. Len, the timid one, the one always fearful of new situations, the shy uncertain man, rose up and faced his death with courage, deep faith, and even humor. Unafraid, he faced whatever was to come. The only time he quailed was in the face of yet another lung tap.

A purpose completed

For two months he was treated with chemo to no avail. Len bore even these unpleasant experiences with courage and good humor. About halfway through January, the doctor told him there was only about a month of life left for him. I asked Len if he was afraid, and he said, "No, just sad." He had a lot of questions about his purpose in life. I offered a few answers, but they didn't satisfy him. Finally I said, "Maybe your task will be completed in your dying." He pondered that for a long time.

Together we planned the funeral. The doxology he chose was "Soar we now where Christ has led," with the first few verses sung before the benediction.

Years ago, Len had seen a program about unique

coffins, especially one that looked like a packing case with "Return to Sender" stamped on it. Now he asked, "Mom do you think we could do something like that?" I went to the funeral home and found a simple wooden box coffin. I brought a photocopy of it to him, and he smiled with pleasure that we had gotten that far. His brother found a truck detailing company that provided the desired stickers. They arrived on Len's 34th birthday, and he blushed with delight. "I want this to be a message for the kids, Mom. One final message that God is real."

From then on, his situation quickly worsened, and he became very weak, to the point we had to borrow a wheelchair for him.

Saying goodbye

Finally, the doctors could do no more, so I decided to take him home where he could die surrounded by his family. We spent the whole week before his return home going to all his favorite haunts to say goodbye to the people he had befriended there. Then came the hardest farewell for him – farewell to Zion Christian Reformed Church in Oshawa. This congregation had become a second family to him. He tried to say a few things, but his already weak voice failed him. I wheeled him to the back of the church to the singing of "God be with you 'til we meet again." After that, the congregation could say goodbye to him in the foyer.

It was almost like a funeral visitation, except that Len himself got to hear all the wonderful things that were said. With tears streaming down their faces, the members of the congregation said their goodbyes and told him how very much he had meant to them. His favorite little boy was laid on his chest, and he wrapped his tiny arms around Len as his dad stood weeping beside him. The praise team gave him their own farewell with "We will dance on the streets that are golden." Then I took him home. I asked if he still wondered about his task on earth, and, with his thin disfigured face glowing, he said, "No Mom. Not any more."

Within two days of his coming home, he could hardly communicate. He had hallucinations, whether caused by drugs or the tumor. With his frail body, he shuffled around in the house trying to deal with what he saw. Finally, the palliative drugs took effect, and, on the morning of February 2, he quieted down. He wanted to sit, but he couldn't. So I let him lean on my shoulder, and I sang to him and prayed one more time with him. I called him "Jochie" (little boy), and he managed to crack a joke of long-standing between us. He answered, "Mommy," which even then he tried to say in the silly way he always did. Then I laid him down, and a CD featuring the boys of "Libera," sang him Home.

Farewell my son. You taught us much about courage and faith and selfless love. Farewell my son. Now the things that troubled you down here are gone, and you are at peace. Farewell.

Coby Veenstra (cobyveenstra@hotmail.com) is a retired teacher who lives in St. Catharines, Ontario.

The Quiet Hour

He has just gone Home
But the tender sounds
Of the boys' voices
That had sung him on his way
Sang on and on.
I had straightened his limbs
Gently closed his eyes
Stuffed a rolled towel under his chin
And sat on the chair beside the bed.
Then I noticed that the insistent voice
In the back of my head,
That had so long pounded
Against the walls of my self-control,
The voice that wailed and wept;
That cringed and pleaded,
The voice that insisted
That I couldn't do this;
That voice was still.
Instead there came
A wonderful stillness
A wonderful peace.
A wonderful quiet.
I sat still and listened
As the boys softly sang
Of comfort, of hope, of Heaven
Of a silent night, a holy night
The stillness became a balm
Soothing away the tensions of my heart.
The music rolled on and I just sat
Drinking in the stillness, the peace
Very soon would come the busyness
Of funeral, the house, the estate
But this hour was for us;
He celebrating his entrance to glory
I celebrating his release
And in my head, I sang
Quietly along
This hour was ours
This quiet hour.

Graveside

There lay that ugly cloth of fake green grass
– a euphemism that fools no one –
And under it lurks the hole – six feet deep
Which soon will hold my son's remains

More euphemism (as so much of Western death rite is)
The straps attached to grand brass posts
Well hid the fact that, when we left,
They'd lower the coffin into the grave

That faith-filled epitaph stamped on the coffin
"Return to Sender," didn't change
The fact that soon his coffin
Would join his father's in the grave

Yes, twelve feet down, the bones still rest
Of his father, ten years gone,
My God, my Father can this be –
That two loved ones' bodies lie there now?

They live with you, I know that surely
But I loved their bodies too; and they lie here.
How can that be, Lord? Can it be true?
O help me bear it; bear me through.

Ministry

Chaplaincy and visitation in prisons



Wil Ingram and John de Vries

Wendy Murchy, Terry Richardson, Henk Smidstra and Arn Main have spent a lot of time in jail. Their experiences behind bars have had a profound impact on their lives – and on their faith. But they are not inmates. Rather, they are four individuals who have been called to the ministry of prison chaplaincy.

Rev. Terry Richardson is a Lutheran minister who is presently serving as the Director-General of Chaplaincy for Correctional Services Canada in Ottawa; Rev. Wendy Murchy is a Pentecostal chaplain in the Fraser Valley institution for women in British Columbia; Rev. Henk Smidstra is a Christian Reformed Chaplain at Alouette Correctional Centre for Women at Maple Ridge, B.C. and Rev. Arn Main is a Protestant chaplain in the Beaver Creek Institution outside of Gravenhurst, Ontario.

The challenges of prison chaplaincy

Prison chaplaincy is a unique and historic form of ministry. On an almost daily basis, the chaplain confronts some of the great questions of our faith. What is the relationship between justice and forgiveness? What does it mean to be in relationship with a person who has committed truly heinous crimes? What role do grace and mercy play in the face of anger and outrage? What does healing look like if there is nothing that can undo the damage? These are only a few of the questions that chaplains are regularly called to ponder.

If a prison chaplain is going to be effective, they must be individuals who minister out of a place of trust. As Terry Richardson states, "Without trust, much of what goes on in the ministry of a chaplain will be hampered severely. Ritual and sacrament as well as various chapel program offerings can still be offered, but the establishment of a trust relationship between chaplain and offenders is critical. This involves clear understanding of pastoral identity as a chaplain, the ability to listen carefully with discernment for what is really going on, being a person of truth, and being able to maintain necessary boundaries with integrity."

Wendy Murchy would echo that emphasis on the importance of trust in the ministry of prison chaplaincy: "People in prison do

not trust easily, and it takes a lot of time to break down the walls and get them to a place where they see me as a 'safe' place to come. But the rewards are worth the time and effort.... Each encounter I have challenges and changes me."

The work of prison chaplaincy is not limited to these spiritual concerns, however. Rather, a history of prison chaplaincy – such as that provided by Rev. Canon J.T.L. James in *A Living Tradition: Penitentiary Chaplaincy* – reveals that prison chaplains have been on the forefront of some of the most significant social issues in our country. These have included movements for human rights, care for the families and victims of offenders, calls for the abolition of capital punishment, and an emphasis on the importance of literacy.



The call to stay on the cutting edge of ministry continues in the modern age. Prison chaplains now serve in contexts in which sensitivity to interfaith and multi-faith issues is paramount. They are called upon to minister in deeply conflicted environments, building bridges of trust with both staff and offenders. They must maintain necessary boundaries while establishing relationships with often feared and marginalized people. They are leaders in the development of the principles of restorative justice, which offers a powerful alternative to more punitive visions of justice.

A call to help

Prison chaplaincy, therefore, is a form of ministry in which the need for spiritual wholeness, for prophetic courage, and for social justice must constantly be balanced. It is a uniquely challenging and rewarding ministry often done, as Henk Smidstra reminds us, "under a lot of stress."

And they should not have to do this work alone. We all know the famous passage from Matthew 25: "I was in prison and you visited me." As Arn Main states, "I believe it would be helpful if church communities were to prayerfully and thoughtfully take the time to explore their reply to Matthew 25:39. The passage rolls off the tongue nicely but

where does the rubber meet the road in their concept of mission?"

The question is an important one. How many of us have ever actually visited a prison? How many of us would face an inmate with fear rather than with love? How many of us would willingly journey with an offender seeking to reintegrate into society at the end of their sentence?

Journeying together

The church can play a part in prison ministries. As well as praying for chaplains, inmates, and victims, congregations should seek to become a place of support and welcome for both victims and offenders. As well as working within their congregations, churches can participate in community-based chaplaincy initiatives. Terry Richardson reminds us that "prisons, and prison ministry, are often out of sight and mind" Or, as Wendy Murchy states, "people don't have to come inside the gates of a prison to make a difference in someone's life."

One example of such a community-based initiative is the Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA), which connects a small group of individuals with

an offender during the first few years after their release from incarceration. Often, these COSAs work with individuals who display a high risk of re-offense but who have completed their prison sentences. While no program can guarantee successful reintegration, it is interesting to note that those COSAs have a demonstrated record in reducing the recidivist rate (the chance of re-offense and re-incarceration). It is not always easy to journey with those who have committed terrible crimes, but the circle members make the journey by seeking the humanity of the offender and seeking to reduce the chances that their crimes ever occur again. Due to growing volunteer support, COSAs continue to grow and make life transforming differences for ex-inmates.

Preparing for the future

Due to several chaplain retirements, the Christian Reformed Church in Canada presently has no chaplains in the Federal Correctional Services. Henk Smidstra, chaplain for the BC corrections branch, is the sole Christian Reformed Chaplain in provincial correctional facilities. While there is encouragement for chaplaincy in general, there is lack of encouragement for ministers to ponder prison chaplaincy as an important

vocational option when seeking calls to new contexts of ministry.

So how should a person who feels a call to prison chaplaincy explore this ministry? Wendy Murchy encourages potential chaplains to speak with a chaplain, visit a prison, and "ask lots of questions and then pray that the Holy Spirit gives clear direction. This ministry is not for everyone, but for those who are called it is incredibly fulfilling and rewarding."

Revs. Will Ingram and John de Vries are the Presbyterian and Christian Reformed representatives on the Federal Interfaith Committee on Chaplaincy for the Correctional Service of Canada.

Moments in Hospital Chaplaincy

Read Psalm 103

A sudden quiet filled the delivery room. Only the whirring hum of some medical machines could be heard. But almost immediately another sound mixed in with those subdued noises. Somebody started crying, and the woman on the bed could not suppress her sobbing. The nurse in charge nodded to one of her assistants. "Call the chaplain," she said. It was a couple of hours past midnight when the phone rang in the chaplain's bedroom. She dressed herself in a hurry and made her way to the hospital. The delivery room was already being readied for another birth. The nurse told the chaplain that there had been a stillbirth. "It wasn't that we had not expected it," she said, "but when it really happened we were all grief stricken." The nurse then referred the chaplain to the room where she found a man and a woman. After a time of silence the chaplain introduced herself and asked if she could pray with the couple. Both the man and the woman nodded without speaking. After her prayer the chaplain read a few verses from the Bible. The old words of Psalm 103 came to life. Some days later, after the chaplain had arranged for and presided at the funeral of the stillborn child and at that occasion had read again Psalm 103, the father spoke to her. "Both my wife and I shall never forget your visit in that hospital room," he said, "and, strangely, that phrase 'forget not all his benefits' is forever anchored in our minds."

Prayer

Help us all, Giver of all good things, to remember your blessings. Even in times of adversity and sorrow grant us an abiding vision of your help in our troubles.

Carl D. Tuyl

Corinthians

Bad company contaminates

Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

1 Cor. 15:33

A. A. VanRuler

The apostle is using here an adage from the hand of the pagan playwright *Menander* who lived approximately 300 years before Christ and whose works were often read and performed. It is possible that Paul knew this expression, not because he had perhaps read the play himself, but because it had become an everyday proverb among the people.

It is important to note that in his preaching the apostle used expressions that were taken from his own culture. That's a good thing to do in all preaching in all ages.

Two sources

On one hand, we have the revelation of God to Israel finding its focus in Christ and in its written form, the Bible: at first the Old, but later also the New Testament. That is the only source of our knowledge of God's truth and his salvation. On the other hand, we have the great and rich world of culture, of science and art. In that world much insight and wonderful form has been acquired.

Are those two opposed and hostile to each other? Or have they nothing to do with each other? Or could they perhaps, somehow, be united? A great and wonderful aspect of Christian thought through the ages is exactly this – that it has been able to mix and unite these two great entities, namely Israelite-biblical and Greco-Roman culture, and later also the Germanic culture.

Already in the New Testament, this process begins. The text above is an example of it. It is true, if not particularly profound. Paul uses a proverb from the Greek culture to express a general thought, but it is still important that he can do it so offhandedly, so naturally. The apostle does not lock himself inside the Jewish form of revelation. Being a free man, he stands smack in the middle of the domain of cultural history and development. And without a care, he uses the element that he meets there. That gives a certain elegance to the apostle's attitude. Where the church is lacking that kind of freedom and is thereby no longer in contact with the culture of its surroundings, it is bound to become a navel-gazing sect.



The dangers of influence

But we must also pay attention to the content of this quote from Menander. Bad company contaminates good morals. Paul points our attention to the fact that it matters which company we choose.

A rather unique characteristic of being human is that a person can be influenced to a large degree. We are aware of this in, for example, fashions. One person imitates the other. What counts as beautiful and proper in one era, will be found beautiful and proper by most people in that particular time. It is not simply imitation, a superficial aping; no, everybody simply *finds* it beautiful and proper.

This does not only concern the clothes we wear; this counts for our behaviour as well. Depending on our environment, era, nation and culture, there are some things we do and some things we don't do. What is important here is that it affects the soul as well. It is this environment that determines whether one finds some things crazy or self-evident. And it becomes even more important when it concerns opinions, value judgments and insights about certain fashionable philosophies. When the wind blows from the west, everything points eastward, both the billowing smoke from the factory chimney and the tiny blade of grass down below.

deepest convictions of the parents. But then the children come in contact with all kinds of friends, male and female, who have an irresistible influence. While propounding what they think are the deepest of life's philosophies, they can often only repeat the most banal of superficialities and sophisms.

Speech into action

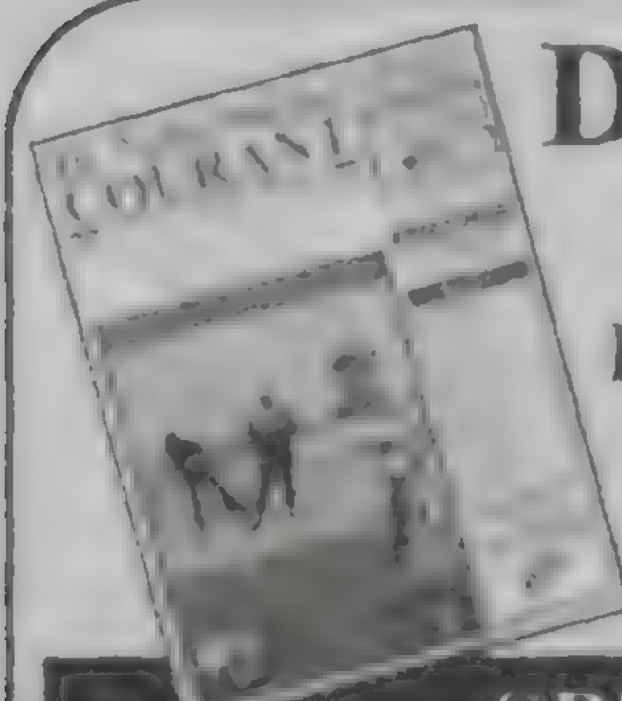
There is one more element here that we need to consider. Bad company, as Menander suggests, spoils good *morals*. Those opinions and insights exchanged in conversations are not mere theories; they are expressed also in the practice of life. A human being is not simply a brain; a man or woman does not only speak; he or she is also a feeling, willing, and acting person. All one's opinions are translated into a certain *practice*.

So here is the most notable aspect of Paul's use of the pagan Menander's quote. Evidently, Paul intends to say that if you are regularly in the company of people who laugh at the resurrection, then severe consequences to one's morals and practice are unavoidable in the long run.

A person's belief or non-belief in the resurrection will determine his or her stance in the world – and it makes a huge difference. One should not have any illusion about that. Do not be misled! You may well think that it really does not matter what you believe because in the end it's all theory anyway, but that kind of opinion is a terrible optical illusion. A human being who wanders away from the basic principles that the gospel has laid as the foundations of human existence must eventually get lost in the labyrinth and the desert of being. A real and deep aberration from the gospel leads to perdition. This pertains to the individual as well as the state and all of its particular culture. Such is the care that the church has when it becomes aware of the ongoing de-Christianization of society. How will one maintain the state, how will one organize society and how will one keep and guard humanity if one no longer knows nor loves the only true God as revealed to Israel in the Christ?

The bad company of merely human philosophy spoils the good morals of being human. It spoils humans in small ways, and it spoils human society as well.

Translated by Bram Hoff, St. Catharines.



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A shift in the cultural mood

One can see this as well in the philosophy – the *mood* – of a culture. Before the Great War, everything in Europe was optimism: human beings were good, life was meaningful, and scientific development was growing by leaps and bounds. For twenty years now



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Review

Jesus, Hamlet, and the culture of kitsch

Brett Alan Dewing

Thirty years ago, the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* launched the hit song "I Don't Know How to Love Him," chronicling ex-prostitute Mary Magdalene's struggle to love Jesus in a chaste way. (Yes, I realize Mary was in all likelihood not a prostitute, but in the play she was.) Ten years ago, that play was revived on Broadway, this time casting Jesus and his hippie-like disciples as the leaders of an underground militia. In this interpretation, Jesus wore jeans and the white sleeveless undershirts that have become known as "wife-beaters". The Jesus of this revival *Superstar* has once more raised his head, this time in the Hollywood comedy *Hamlet 2*, newly released on DVD.

Jesus in pop culture

Now, the representation of Jesus can in itself be a controversial topic, laced with references to the second commandment as fervent as an American's constant invocation of the first amendment (and, as we will see, *Hamlet 2* is a film that in some way seeks to compare the two). No matter our stance on graven images, however, we must certainly pay attention whenever a version of Jesus enters the cultural awareness.

Over the years, a wide array of Jesuses have paraded their various ideologies through the consciences of the public. There have been the love-hippie from *Godspell*, the all-too-human man in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and most recently the living lenten woodcut of *The Passion of the Christ*.

In many ways, though, it is the *Superstar* Jesus who has most firmly rooted himself in the zeitgeist. Lloyd Webber and his writing partner Tim Rice hold Jesus up as more of a metaphor than a deity. He is a man who deeply believes in God's plan but cannot always see it. He weeps for a world that cannot see the Light, but he weeps even more for himself. While there are certainly good things to be learned about Christ's human nature from *Superstar*, the play is more expressly concerned with conjecturing what Jesus's role in culture might have been, is, and may be.



A man of sorrows, to be sure

It is this question that once again is raised in this year's *Hamlet 2*. The film concerns a talentless drama teacher in the American Southwest who sets out to save his school theatre program by mounting a self-written semi-autobiographical musical sequel to Shakespeare's longest work. Obviously, it is a comedy, and a very secular one at that. Imagine *Waiting for Guffman* for the *Superbad* crowd.

For me, though, the true humour in the movie comes from how painfully, painfully real the main character is. As someone who has studied under, worked with, and worked as a theatre teacher, the pitiful antics of the character, played by wonderful British comedian Steve Coogan, struck home to me all too well.

Thoroughly self-obsessed, Coogan's character emotes in increasingly overt ways, constantly mistaking drama for, well...*drama*. In one telling scene, he extols for his disinterested class the power of the "shared experience" after accidentally braining a student with a flung wastepaper basket. "It was stupid," he admits, "but it was also theatre!" The sad thing is that I was with him the whole way, simultaneously thinking "what a delusional freak" and "he's got that right, though."

Who has seen the Son has also seen the Father

Long story short, the play he writes is a thinly veiled pity party about his relationship with his father. In theatre, this is hardly new, but it is the baldness with which he seeks to find healing for his past through what he sees as art that creates the humour and the pathos. And

since it is a play about fathers and sons (what else is *Hamlet*, after all?), it is shockingly fitting that a jeans-and-wife-beater Jesus shows up to invoke history's purest Father-Son relationship.

Uproar ensues when word gets out of the play's central musical number, "Rock Me, Sexy Jesus." Perhaps this is a good time to stress that *Hamlet 2* is chock-full of decidedly inappropriate material, ranging from the grossly sexual to the grossly insensitive. It is, however, in my opinion, just as full of the worthwhile as the crude. Many forget that Shakespeare's works are much the same that way.

Responding to a parent's concern, one student responds that "it's about what if Jesus came back today; he'd have to market himself as a superstar." Yes, it is about that, but it is also about much more.

"Do you think you're what they say you are?"

To begin with, though, let's look at the claim that Jesus would need a good PR man to bring the Gospel to 21st century America. On the face of it, this seems unfortunately true. I'm not sure, however, that Jesus's actual time on earth (in, it must be noted, the time God deemed most ripe for his coming) bears this out.

Sure, Christ took his entourage all over the ancient world, performing spectacular feats and calling great attention to himself. But he also spent an inordinate amount of time and energy trying to avoid the public eye. Multiple times, he cautions his disciples not to tell anyone what they have seen. He frequently sneaks off in the middle of something to be alone. He asks those whom he has cured not to reveal who it was who healed them. Though crowd scenes were part of his ministry, the bulk of it was spent one-on-one, often in

places that did little for his credibility. In fact, it was Jesus's poor publicity that got him quite literally crucified.

Now imagine Paris Hilton with supernatural abilities. I think you'd see a slightly different trajectory.

And yet, Jesus has become an undeniable celebrity. As was foretold, his name has reached the ends of the earth, though there are plenty who have even now not heard.

"Who do you say that I am?"

To the postmodern highschooler, though, the notion of the "Sexy Jesus" is a no-brainer. Sexy is the all-purpose compliment of the day, and sex appeal is the only effective power in their world. Though the students at first find it hard to reconcile this description with their idea of Christ as the ultimate puritan buzzkill, they ultimately come to embrace this more relatable Jesus.

It's time to pause again for a word from our sponsors. In my critique of the film's portrayal of a Christ character, I am not endorsing it as theologically or missionally sound. Ensnared as we are in a tradition that praises common grace, I believe that it is our duty to find the truth in everything we encounter. While *Hamlet 2* and "Rock Me, Sexy Jesus" are far from biblical, there is something to be learned from them. This is, after all, a mass market Hollywood film made by staunch atheists that nonetheless spends a great deal of time concerned with the representation of Jesus.

In the course of the movie's scandal over the play's alleged blasphemy, a crass ACLU lawyer appears, making it blatantly clear that she has no concern in what she is fighting for, only what she is fighting against. This is perhaps the most telling bit of the film, and I mention it to say that the writers are equal opportunity offenders.

"Wait, I get it!"

When the night of the play arrives, both the audience in the film and the audience of the film are a bit surprised. Instead of simply the ramblings of a narcissist, "Hamlet 2" (the play within the film) is an almost astute portrait of our culture painted in kitsch. By employing an endless stream of kitsch set pieces (wire harness light saber duels, pop song sing-alongs...), the play speaks the students' language, as it were. And what it talks about is a culture in which the idea of "Rock me, Sexy Jesus" is possible, a world in which *Hamlet* has been placed on a par with *Grease*.

When the infamous song begins, devout students rush toward the stage with Bibles and prayers of exorcism. Suddenly, listening to the lyrics, one of the protesting students shouts, "Wait! I get it!" And suddenly, I do.

Hamlet 2 knows what it is. And, an even bigger surprise, it seems to know the world in which it exists, the world that has made it possible.



Memoirs

Journal of a Dutch immigrant (Part III)

Francis Ruiter of Edmonton has published his memoirs, *Journal of a Dutch Immigrant*. We have decided to publish three excerpts.

Francis Ruiter

I arrived in Vancouver from Houston, B.C., in the early spring of 1950. I found employment as a farm hand on Sea Island, presently the site of the Vancouver International Airport. I was one of about five farmhands living in an upstairs bunkhouse, above the kitchen and eating area and the farmer's office.

The only way I could get from the farm to the city proper was by catching a bus – and buses ran infrequently – or by getting a ride. I needed transportation badly. So, I decided to get a car from a secondhand car lot I had seen somewhere in the middle of town. I told George, the salesman, that I was interested in a secondhand car, preferably a coupe. He did not have one on the sales lot, but he promised that he would find one for me and phone me.

Sure enough, a week later, George had me take a look at a 1936 Buick coupe he had found. It had a straight eight engine and one bench-style seat which could accommodate three people comfortably. It had a large elongated trunk. It looked quite attractive with its large, round headlights affixed to the two front fenders. I looked over this shiny car with its leather seats and at the powerful engine under the hood. "What do you think, Francis?" said George, "Isn't it a beauty?" I was drooling.

Over the two previous years, working as a farmhand and a bushwhacker, I had saved up about \$600. I must have mentioned something to George about my approximate savings because \$600 was exactly the price he quoted! Since I was a greenhorn in dealing with a car salesman, I took his word for it. I didn't know about bargaining. I had withdrawn almost all my savings from the bank the day before, and now I just handed over the money. However, when the salesman became aware that I'd given him pretty well the last dollar I possessed, he refunded me two dollars for fuel to put in the near-empty tank.

I had had experience in driving a car before coming to Vancouver but was not eligible for a driver's license because I had not

reached my twenty-first birthday. Since I did not have a license, the salesman suggested I take a circuitous route home to avoid police surveillance. So, off I went, bought some fuel, and made it safely back to the farm.

New friends

I named the car Lucille. Proud as a peacock, I took my Lucille to the next Young People's Society meeting. Here my new



acquisition was admired and, to my great surprise, right after our meeting three girls piled into the front seat! There wasn't quite enough room for everyone, but we all squeezed in. We had the time of our life riding in Lucille. The girls were ecstatic, saying what a beautiful car it was and how lucky I was. I wondered, *Have I become popular?* Well, maybe somewhat, but they were more attracted by the novelty of cruising around the city and going to a park and beach. It was a bit crammed with four of us in the front seat, but manageable. I drove the girls home. The last one was slow to leave the front seat, but my mind was elsewhere. My newly acquired automobile was my first love.

A few weeks later, when I turned 21, I decided it was time to obtain my driver's license. The week before, I had had quite a scare. I had come to a large intersection and I had to make a left turn. As there were no traffic lights, a policeman was directing traffic. I was somewhat unsure about his signals, and the traffic gendarme was waving a finger at me, as if to say I should know the rules. A close call, I thought. Luckily, I was not asked to pull over for inspection and show a license.

Arriving at the licensing bureau a few days later, I picked up an application, together with a small booklet to study the rules of the road. Choosing a desk a distance from the front counter, I started reading the information and filling it in on the form. Nobody took notice of me, and I thought, *This is kind of neat, I don't need to take the booklet home to study*. So, after finishing the form,

I handed over the application and set a date for the driver's test. I completed it a week later without a problem.

In the meantime, I had met a family at church who very kindly took me into their home since I was new in town and a bit lonely. I had let it be known that I was not happy with my present employment. This resulted in my host, Mr. Hiemstra, introducing me to his place of work, a shingle

his breath. Then we both laughed, thinking it funny. But it was not funny; he could have fallen out and been seriously injured or died. Some angel must have been there, shaking its head.

On another occasion, I took a coworker named Fred along to Telkwa, some forty miles from Houston, where we had a few beers. Driving home, just before dusk, the headlights would not come on. I kept driving, wanting to arrive before full darkness set in. We did not make it. I had to follow the tail-lights of someone ahead of me until we arrived at our destination. Fred bragged to his friends about our journey in the dark and our daring drive became the talk of town.

By the time winter arrived, my Lucille had traveled over quite a few rough roads. She required an overhaul, and it would be expensive. She needed new tires and a wheel alignment. Also, the exhaust was spouting blue smoke. I parked Lucille in my uncle's farmyard, considering what to do. A few days later winter set in. The radiator froze and blew a few gaskets. I didn't have money for the repair. I left Lucille looking very mournful with her drooping headlights, which had come loose from their bearings on the front bumpers.

Employed in Dieleman's lumber camp, deep in the woods, that winter, I managed to save a few dollars. In the spring I decided to part with Lucille and bought a new 1951 Ford pickup truck. It was more rugged and suitable for rough roads, especially the sometimes bumpy and muddy bush roads.

I missed my sexy Lucille, but she left me with great memories.

factory situated along the Fraser River. He also offered me room and board with them. A few days later, I got a phone call that the factory would hire me, pronto. After a full day's work on the farm, I drove to the factory and worked through the evening, finishing at midnight. I was totally worn out by the time I reached the farm's bunkhouse that night. The next morning I gave my notice to the farmer.

I was very fortunate. I had better employment, at \$1.15 per hour, I had been taken in by a really nice family, and I had a nice car: the Buick coupe. It was a great new start in the summer of 1950. In reciprocation to my benefactors, I gave them rides whenever I had the opportunity.

Bringing a town car to the country

By the end of the summer, I decided to return to Houston. It was a 700-mile drive northward, along the beautiful Fraser River. I stopped overnight in Prince George, freeing Lucille of the dust from the gravel roads. The next day, my cousins welcomed me back, and I proudly showed them my shiny Buick with its straight eight engine. I demonstrated how powerful it was by driving up the fairly steep incline of "Hungry Hill" and not having to gear down.

The roads in some places in northern British Columbia were wicked in terms of rocks and bends. Once, on a very rough section, coming around a bend, the vibration from the rocky surface caused the passenger door to come undone. My cousin Bill, sitting next to the door, held on to the seat (there were no seatbelts in those days) and held



Author Donna Dawson writes: "Francis Ruiter allowed me to see through his eyes, the Holland of the war years, a simpler more beautiful life where family was centred around a love of God. In his brusque and tongue-in-cheek way, Francis has opened a wonderful door to the past for future generations."

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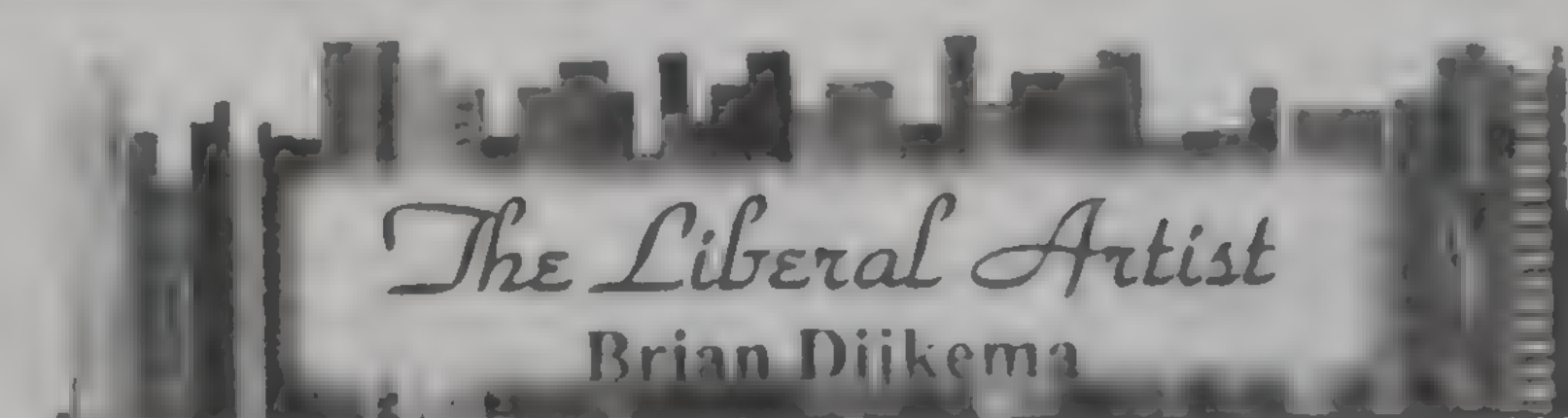
Email address: francisruiter@shaw.ca.



The author, Francis Ruiter

Columns

Looking at life from a wisdom perspective



When asked by the incoming editors of *Christian Courier* to create a regular column, I could think of no better perspective from which to write than from that of a liberal artist.

I'll admit that such a title might throw a few people off. These days, liberal arts are more likely to be equated with crucifixes in urine or the latest bit of attention-seeking from a narcissistic artist than typical fare for a Reformed bi-monthly.

Yet, somehow the title seems to fit well. The Reformed community, historically, has thought deeply about freedom, and many died for it. And freedom is at the heart of the liberal arts. The liberal arts aimed to teach knowledge to people who are free. Classically this was understood in contrast to those who needed to toil for their livelihood – slaves. While we can give thanks that today (at least in the West) slavery has been abolished, there seems to be some sense in resurrecting this distinction. After all, much of what passes for education or thoughtful discussion these days is more concerned with what will make our country, family, church, school – you name it – prosperous and successful.

We might indeed be a rich society, but we are not necessarily a free – or good – society.

In a recent column, the feminist Camille Paglia, – certainly not someone who would identify herself as being within the Reformed tradition – has gone so far as to describe the “pre-college rat race” as a “sodomasochistic imposition on the young that robs them of free will and saps their vital energies.” I agree, and would add that expectations for people, as they leave university or college, and enter the workforce, are exactly the same. And what, I ask, is slavery *but* a sodomasochistic imposition that robs people of their free will?

Paglia goes on to ask: “When will they rebel?” This column is one small act of rebellion.

Wide-ranging competency

So, what can you expect to read in this column? Well, bits about anything and everything, but seen through the lense of the liberal arts. A good friend of mine from university (yes, it was a liberal arts school), a theatre and English major, says that “a liberal arts education is all about looking good at cocktail parties.” And, while it is likely that he said this with a cocktail in hand and, therefore, needs to be taken with a healthy dose of salt, the classic “trivium,” which examines things

as they are known, the symbols which we use to describe them, and the way in which those symbols are communicated in a given circumstance, are basic to knowledge. That, combined with the “quadrivium” – examining numbers and how they interact in space and time – provides one with the ability to speak about politics, poetry, literature and a whole host of subjects with at least a minimal degree of competency. I might add that this friend of mine – so immersed in language in his undergraduate studies – is now studying to be an architect in British Columbia. I consider him to be among the best examples of the type of person formed by the liberal arts (a compliment which I hope he will repay with a free redesign of my house).

But hold on, you say. Why would anyone but the, oh, say 23 people in Canada who wear brown corduroy, exude a slight odour of burnt coffee and habitually inhabit the library be interested in reading such a column? What does a column about the liberal arts have to say to someone who landscapes, raises children, wires houses or makes auto parts?

A fair point, perhaps, but remember that this is a Reformed magazine, and the author is Reformed as well. Charles Taylor, a great Canadian philosopher, has underlined how

the Reformed tradition recovered a sense of the significance of everyday life. Think, for instance, of Rembrandt's paintings of a flayed ox, or of two women teaching a young girl how to walk. I promise to be true to this ethos in my next column, in which I will take up how one's approach to gardening says a lot about oneself and one's culture.

The liberal arts allow us to examine the events of our everyday life from a unique perspective. One more concerned with wisdom than the bottom line. And, as the teacher has said, there is a strong connection between wisdom, freedom and the fear of the Lord. Won't you join me?

Brian Dijkema currently works for an independent trade union with approximately 47,000 members across Canada.

He has a B.A. (Political Science and Humanities) from Redeemer University College and an MWS (Political Theory) from the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. Brian's work varies from directing the union's international program and its new initiative for the self-employed to basic labour relations and communicating with the general public about the union, its principles and its work.



A slice of marital life...behind closed doors

“Even the title is enigmatic – ‘Revolutionary Road’ could be an ironic commentary on a marriage all too ordinary. Then again, this Sam Mendes movie based on Richard Yates's 1961 novel could be an urgent plea to step away from the status quo and start a revolution of the soul.”

Katherine Monk, *The Vancouver Sun*

Who would have thought the above film would create the buzz it did the last few weeks? By now we have had several decades of feminism influence under our belt. Yet, Hollywood once again lures us back to the nostalgic 50's. Unfortunately, there is nothing nostalgic about this film.

Katherine Monk, a film critic for *The Vancouver Sun*, gave the film four stars out of five. This aroused my curiosity since she's rarely this generous. But it was her review and especially the quote above that got my thoughts twisting and turning even though I never read the book.

Conforming to life in the suburbs

The story is set in 1955, and focuses on Frank and April Wheeling, a confident suburbanite couple with two children in Connecticut. The film begins when they fall in love but soon jumps from their romantic haze to being a typical married couple, with two kids and a house in the suburbs. Unfortunately, they are heading straight for a full blown case of spiritual malaise that often accompanies



Leonardo DiCaprio as “Frank Wheeler” & Kate Winslet as “April Wheeler” Photo by Francois Duhamel

conformity and material prosperity.

Frank is “stuck in a rut” and is an irresponsible office worker. April, by contrast, is more focused as she tries to adapt to the ordinary dreams of life in the suburbs. She looks after their household while trying her hand at acting on the local stage, which unfortunately does not pan out. After several stormy altercations she suggests to Frank they move to Paris to revitalize their lives. Frank finally warms up to the idea, and April makes arrangements and starts packing. A little later, Frank begins to enjoy some unexpected corporate success, and April discovers she is pregnant. Both experiences throw a wrench into their move to Paris.

On the whole, I agree with Katherine Monk: “Revolutionary Road” could indeed be an ironic commentary on a marriage all too ordinary between two spirited people – “looking good” on the outside

but “simmering” on the inside. Frank and April's conflicts behind closed doors are loud, aggressive and cruel. They resolve little and leave further pain on their marital trail.

Plodding through empty landscapes

But it is the last part of Monk's above quote that especially makes sense to me. Could the film be an urgent plea to encourage marital partners to step away from the status quo and start a revolution of the soul (discovering who we really are as a separate self, not the roles we play in our family, at work or community at large)? Is Mendes, the director of the film, challenging us to strip away the vinyl façade of being what others expect us to be or who we think we ought to be?

And this is April's problem. She is unable to keep herself separate from Frank. On the other hand, this is a common problem in marriage. To “get unstuck” from this quagmire we need to accept our “interdependence” (we are not totally independent since we chose to marry and have children) but not hide behind the marital relationship, nor the strengths or weaknesses of our spouse, but carve out our own place for self expression with all its risks and turmoil.

For myself, I remember the feeling of loss I experienced when I chose to take some years off work. To deal with these uncomfortable feelings I was surprised to find myself seek-

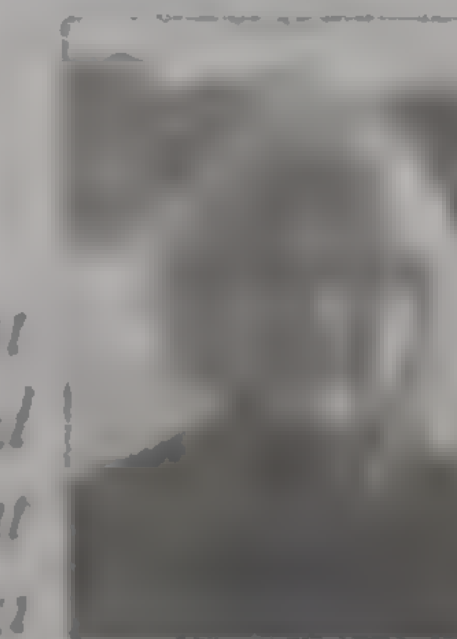
ing more affirmation from my spouse in terms of my worth and competence than I did before. Recognizing this unhelpful behaviour and challenging myself to develop another aspect of my character saved my spouse and me from needless conflicts.

The film also begs the question of whether Frank and April's move to Paris would have saved their marriage. I doubt it, since it was April's idea to move, hoping it would spice up their lives especially in terms of helping Frank become more clear about what he wants to do in the future. She hoped that it, ultimately, would benefit the marital relationship.

In reality, married or not, each individual must plod through his or her own empty landscapes in search of what matters in life. No one can do the work for the other.

Still, I continue to wonder why this simple film created the buzz it did. On the other hand, Frank and April's frustrations and yearnings for something better than the superficial trappings of the North American dream provides common ground for the realization that we all need to find a larger as well as a spiritual meaning in place of our superficial world.

Arlene Van Hove is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca



Getting Unstuck Arlene Van Hove

Reflections

From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

It occurred to me as the Old Year turned to the New that the delineating of time by means of years (and months and days) is one of God's marvelous gifts to us.

When God created our solar system's planets to orbit our sun and simultaneously rotate on their axes to produce years, and days and nights, he knew (of course!) that the Earth where he would place us would have to fit our needs. And the boundaries God drew – of light and darkness, of lunar months and seasons making up years – *do* that exactly as he planned. Imagine living on Jupiter, where God created the day to last just 9 hours and 55 minutes; or Mercury, where one day lasts 176 earth days.

After the Fall, those delineations took on a different dimension. We sin-plagued, fragile human beings tire easily, physically, mentally and spiritually. We crave both the refreshment of rest and the possibilities we face each new day. We need routine but we also weary of it. We're comfortable with the old but long for the new. We make mistakes, grievous errors, grave sins; and when we do, we long to start over. We want, and need, not just to begin again, but to start over blamelessly, fault-free, slate-wiped, forgiven (by our fellows and by God), and to continue in that grace.

We *need* new beginnings: daily, monthly, yearly. Sometimes we need them desperately. God knew we would. And so the turn of one year to the next peculiarly affords us yet another opportunity to "start over."

Our own worst enemy

We know that renewed resolve and willpower, in themselves, aren't going to get us far. New Year's resolutions have fallen on hard times because they don't have a stellar record. As the Apostle Paul says, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing" (Romans 7:19, ESV) – that, despite best intentions, new resolve and willpower we thought were firm.

The cure is "deliverance from this body of death" – which comes through Christ, and which, thanks be to God, prevents our eternal condemnation. If we grew up in a Christian home we've heard that ever since we could crawl. But often that "deliverance," which we mostly see as a future event, doesn't seem to relate to our annual resolutions to improve ourselves; nor to our daily lives.

Yet my (and your) deliverance is surely also very much present tense. It is my daily deliverance from "the evil I do not want [to do]." In other words, it is all about sanctification. That's a theological word every Reformed person surely knows. It is both a life-long process and a present reality. So the old picture of sanctification as a road to be traveled is a good one. That "road" is our daily working out of our salvation with fear and trembling, a working out that *does work* because it is God who is working in us (Phil. 2:12-13).

Travel changes us

Now if we're on the road, we're traveling. And traveling has a goal, and requires energy and persistence. If we don't persevere we literally won't get anywhere. But when we do persist we gain ground; we see and experience new things; we feel joy along the way and when we achieve our destination. Travel changes us.

If traveling across our globe and its cultures opens us up to new places, thoughts and attitudes, traveling the sanctification road, far more, opens us up to God in Christ and his Spirit. We are *changed*! True "change we can believe in"! Each day we live in closer fellowship with God; and

over time we can see how far God has brought us: what glories he has worked so that we may give him glory more and more.

But it doesn't happen automatically. Traveling as Christ's disciples is work (as Paul said). Hard work. It's sometimes painful, even deadly. Satan prowls that road as a vicious intruder, as if a lion looking for prey to devour (1 Peter 5:5). So beware, says Peter, "be self-controlled and alert." If you are, as you travel that road you "are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls," Peter assures us (1 Peter 1:9). "Are receiving" indicates that the sanctification road involves a marathon to be run, not an instantly gratifying hundred-meter dash.

Most of us wilt at the very thought of marathons. But we need not despair. When we ask, God will give us not only self-control and watchfulness but much more: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness," says Peter in his second letter (1:3).

Peter adds this amazing sentence: "Through these [God's glory and goodness] he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that *through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires* (my emphasis)." That certainly is the answer to all useless New Year's resolutions that attempt to combat "evil desires" with mere human willpower!

Through God's promises we participate in God's own nature; we become *god-ly*. That allows our escape from evil things we hate but do anyway; and it allows us to be unmoved by the lure of evil things that the world wholeheartedly embraces, to its corruption.

Then Peter gives as good a description of the road to sanctification as is set down anywhere in the Bible. The "trip" hangs on our participation in God's divine nature and incapability of being tainted by the corruption in the world. So – "for this reason" – *make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ* (2 Peter 1:5-8).

Seeking glory, honor, immortality

As we travel that road in faith we go "farther up and farther in," as C.S. Lewis put it in his *Narnia Chronicles*. We go from strength to strength; we're effective and productive. Note the progression: goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, love. That progression will bring us ever closer to God's heart (would that he can say of us, as he said of David, "He/she is a man/woman after my own heart"). But it also makes us increasingly useful to our neighbor, to other members of Christ's body and to those who need to know him and need our help.

Paul talks about it as finishing a race (which will win us crowns of righteousness). But we're also fighting in a cosmic battle, which requires "putting on the whole armor of God." However it is described, "to those who by persistence in

doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life" (Romans 2:7).

That is very good news for a new year. Even though the evil desires that reap corruption in the world are more evident and more virulent, and the daily news reveals graphic examples across the spectrum, from our neighbors, to societal institutions, to world governments, we need not fear. We must be alert, as Peter says. And wise as serpents and harmless as doves, as Jesus says. But not afraid. Though the signs are dark and the battles fierce, the war is already won.

Our job is to keep awake and faithfully travel the road Christ put us on from all eternity. "Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed," Jesus says in the midst of the last battle in Revelation 16.

Thanks be to God who gives the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY. She may be contacted by email at: mvantil@roadrunner.com or via her website: www.wordpowerpublishing.com



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Please note: The rates for the CRC Extension Fund were incorrectly stated in the January 12 issue of CC. We apologize for the error.

Classifieds/Job Opportunities

Obituary	Personal
<p>WENDELL VANDENHAZEL of Drayton went home to be with his Lord peacefully on Monday December 1, 2008 in his 82nd year.</p> <p>Beloved husband of Diane (Huberts) VandenHazel for 49 years. Loving father of Wayne VandenHazel of Palmerston, Helen and Marion Jordan of Bluevale and Rose and Erik Jansen of Moorefield. Loved Opa of Michelle Drier of Waterloo and her friend Jerrad Michael Drier of Kitchener and Dennis and David Jansen of Moorefield. Brother of Jenny Mazereeuw of Drayton Alice and Jake Visscher of Wallenstein, Bert and Gerdy VandenHazel of Drayton and Wayne and Diny VandenHazel of Moorefield. Brother-in-law of Ben and Pauline Huberts of Sidney, B.C. Effie and Walter Feddema of Watford and Terry and Dale Huberts of Victoria, B.C. Fondly remembered by many nieces, nephews and friends.</p> <p>The family received friends on Thursday December 4, 2008 at the Drayton Christian Reformed Church where Rev. John Vanderburgh conducted the Funeral Service on Friday, December 5, 2008 at 2:00 p.m. Interment Drayton Cemetery. As expression of sympathy donations to the Red Cross would be appreciated by the family. Arrangements entrusted to Heritage Funeral Home Box 111 Drayton ON N0G 1P0 519-638-3072</p>	<p>Christian lady looking for good-looking male 50-60 years old, who has varied interests and likes to laugh. Phone 613-961-7552</p> <p>For Rent Spacious three bedroom brick bungalow with attached garage on half acre of land in rural setting. This home is located 5 km out the of growing town of Binbrook on the border of Hamilton-Wentworth and West Lincoln. Lawn maintenance and snow removal included. Will be available mid February 2009. Please call John or Jennifer Nobels at 905-692-6201 for more information.</p> <p>Spacious 1 bedroom basement apartment approximately 10 minutes west of London in a quiet village setting. Includes use of garage. Call 519-666-1419</p> <p>Vacation For rent: 2 bedroom, 2 bath guest cottage in Tallahassee, Florida. \$650 per week furnished with linens, close to state park, hiking & biking trails, tennis. Call 850-386-6648</p> <p>Holiday in Holland Beautiful self-contained cottage in Friesland www.chestnutlane.nl</p> <p>DUTCH SERVICE January 25 at 3:00 p.m. in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church. Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching.</p>

Job Opportunities
<p> WOODLAND CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL</p> <p>Woodland Christian High School invites applications for definite and possible teaching positions for the 2009-2010 school year. Teachers who are qualified to teach in the following areas are encouraged to apply:</p> <p>French Mathematics</p> <p>Please address inquiries to John VanPelt, Principal at principal@woodland.on.ca. Information about Woodland Christian High School is available on our website at www.woodland.on.ca</p>
<p>Covenant CRC in WINNIPEG is currently vacant and is seeking expressions of interest from retired pastors to serve our congregation as</p> <p>INTERIM PASTOR</p> <p>for a mutually agreed upon period of time. Please contact the chairperson of Council, John Doornbos, at jdoor@shaw.ca.</p>
<p>Interested in adding your voice to a values-based organization that balances business with stewardship?</p> <p> Long-Term Thinking for Today's Issues</p> <p>Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario</p> <p>7660 Mill Rd. RR #4 Guelph, ON N1H 6J1</p> <p>Voice: 519-837-1620 Fax: 519-824-1835 email: cfomail@christianfarmers.org website: www.christianfarmers.org</p>
<p> PARENT PROFESSIONALS</p> <p>Mutual Support Systems of the Niagara Region, a non-profit agency providing residential care and treatment for children invites applications for the position of House Parents. An ideal career choice for a married couple to work together in meaningful ministry, these are full-time, salaried, live-in positions for both partners. Our House Parents are the heart and soul of the Mutual Support program.</p> <p>See our web site for more program information. Please contact:</p> <p>Randy Klassen Associate Director-Human Resources 792 Canboro Road Fenwick ON L0S 1C0 rklassen@mutualsupport.net Tel: 905 892 4332 www.mutualsupport.net</p>



The Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group presents

"Eerlijk of Heerlijk"

Een plattelandskomedie in drie bedrijven door Hans Gnant A. Smit

Friday March 6th 2009 at 8.00 PM
Saturday March 7th 2009 at 2.30 PM
Saturday March 7th 2009 at 8.00 PM

Market Centre Theatre
22 Reeve Street, Woodstock, Ontario

Admission: \$15 – Advance tickets only
Net proceeds to Children's Hospital of Western Ontario

Tickets available at

Maya Health Food Centre & Dutch Shop
55 Ingersoll Road, Woodstock

Mike's Meat Market
1866 Dundas Street, London

Or send cheque and stamped self-addressed envelope to

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Also playing at
Great Lakes Christian College in **Beamsville** on Friday March 27th at 8.00 PM
London Dutch Canadian Hall in **London** on Friday April 3rd at 8.00 PM

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Bonds – Sold Out

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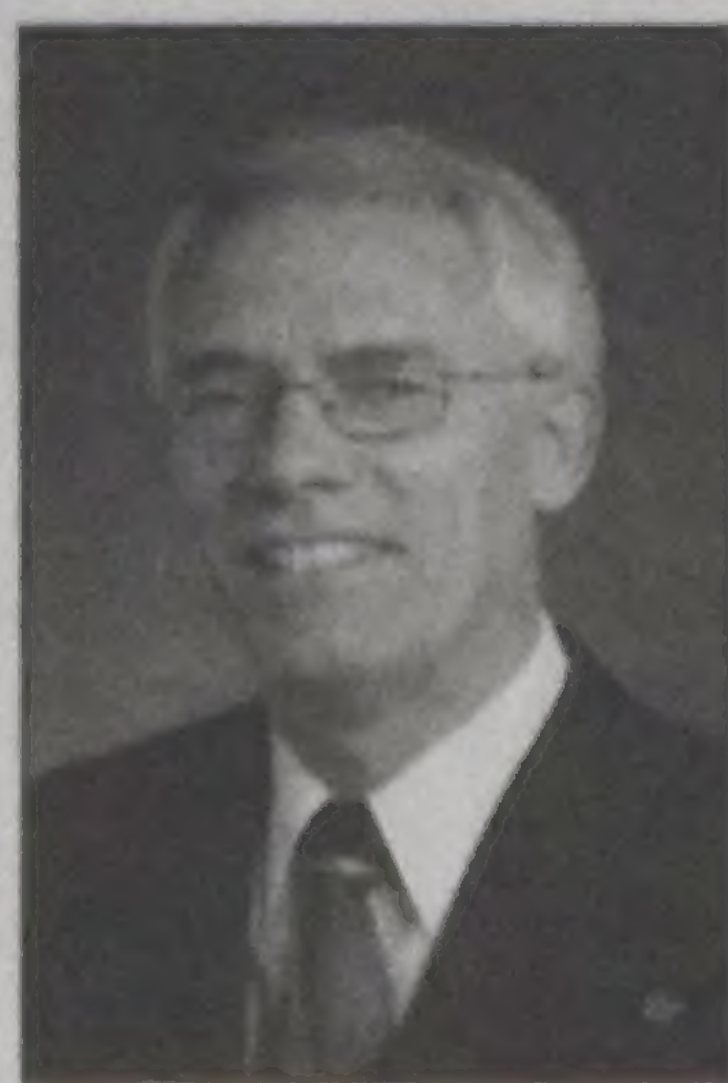
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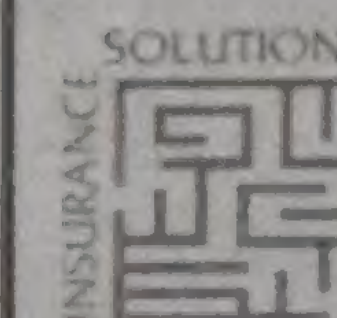
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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Jan 25, 2009 - Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching.

Feb 13-15 Marriage Encounter weekend, **Niagara Falls**, ON See ad p.10.

Mar 6, 7 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group presents "Eerlijk of Heerlijk" Market Centre Theatre, 22 Reeve Street, **Woodstock**, Ontario Admission: \$15 - Advance tickets only. See ad this issue for details.

Mar 27 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group presents "Eerlijk of Heerlijk" at Great Lakes Christian College in **Beamsville** on Friday at 8 p.m. See ad this issue for ticket information and details.

Apr 3 The Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group presents "Eerlijk of Heerlijk" at the London Dutch Canadian Hall in **London** at 8 p.m. See ad this issue for details.

Apr 24-25 Marriage Encounter weekend, **London**, ON See ad p. 10.

May 23 Combined nine Male Choirs (over 300 voices) from Southwestern Ontario, will present D. V. a Festival of Praise Concert, singing all Sacred mass numbers, at the Centennial Hall, 555 Wellington Street, London, Ontario. Saturday, May 23, 2009. Time: 7:30 p.m. Doors open 6:30 p.m. Tickets \$13.00 from all choir members and host Choir: St. Thomas District Male Choir "Crescendo". For tickets and information please call: (519) 637-4357 or (519) 631-9245 No reserved seating.

Community events can also be found on our website at www.christiancourier.ca



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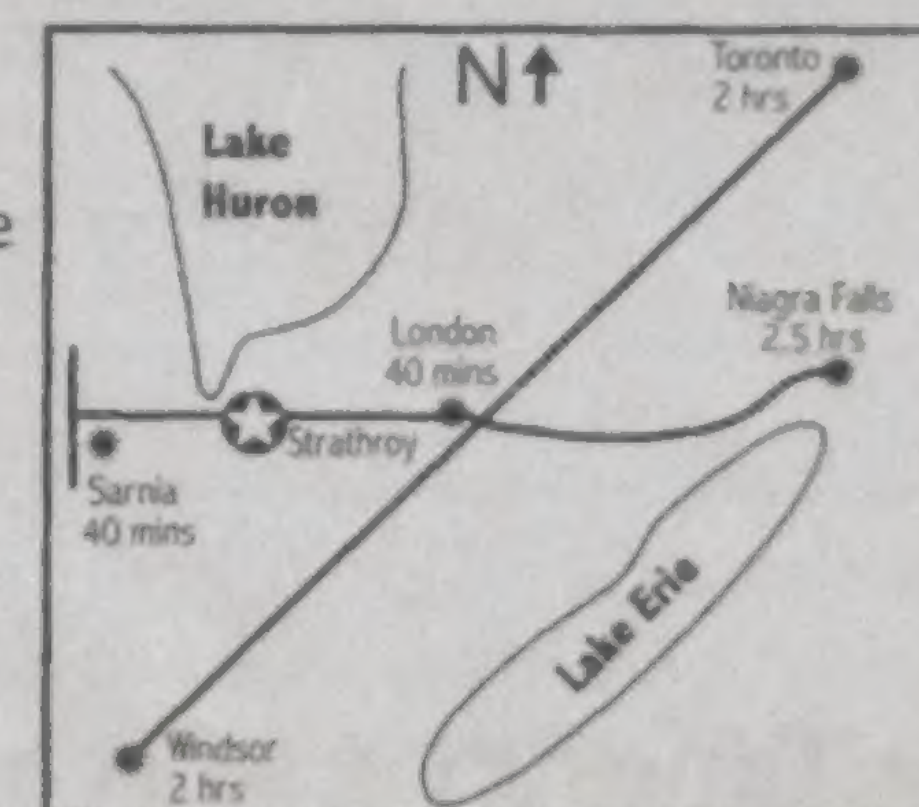
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News

The CRC in its second century: This ain't your grand-dad's church



Angela Reitsma Bick

Recently, I read Ty Hoffman's wonderful book, *A History of the CRC in Canada: its First Century*. In his last chapters, he gathered a number of reflections from past and present pastors in the CRC, and each one discusses what this denomination has lost and what it's gained since transplantation into Canadian soil in 1905. More than one person misses an old-time studying of Scripture, the Heidelberg in sermons, and a sacrificial spirit among congregants.

On the other hand, there is much to celebrate if we consider other developments. As a denomination, we have a greater zeal for evangelism, less of a focus on ourselves, and – in general – more joyful worship. We can also praise God

for the increased diversity within our churches. It is with those positive aspects in mind that I invite you to read about these unique Christian Reformed Churches from across Canada.



The Tapestry Church in Richmond, British Columbia

Geoff Vandermolen

In the summer of 2004, forty people gathered in the fellowship hall of First Richmond CRC to pray and dream. They shared a vision of bringing people from diverse ethnic and faith backgrounds into a community of faith in Jesus Christ. In November of 2004, 150 people gathered for the first public worship service of "the Tap," and the dream was officially launched. That Sunday was the beginning of a God-authored adventure for everyone involved!

Three years later, the Tap inherited the First Richmond CRC building when First dissolved. Tap church leaders insisted that the building be used as a tool for intersecting with individual people and the community. The result? Walk into the Tap these days and you will find the place buzzing with activity, including a busy preschool, alternating

Anglican and Chinese Baptist services, Amnesty International meetings, the local Pro-Life group, Bible studies, coffee groups and a whole lot more.

The Tap makes the claim that it is "a community woven together in faith," as its name implies. With an attendance of over 250 people from more than 20 different nationalities, it's not hard to see that the dream has become a wonderful reality. Pastor Albert Chu is quick to praise his staff and the Tap's leaders for providing the vision and grace to create this unique and growing church. Similarly, the diverse members of the Tap are quick to praise and thank God for the way he is writing his story into the life of this unique and growing community of faith.

Want to find out more about the Tap? Head over to www.thetapestry.ca for podcasts, blogs and media coverage.



Discovery Church in Bowmanville, Ontario

AJ Spoelstra

As a joint venture of Home Missions, Classis Quinte and Rehoboth CRC in Bowmanville, Discovery Church began regular Sunday worship time in September 2006. Doing things differently from your "Grand-dad's church" has opened doors within our community for people to come as they are to discover, grow, and serve. Holding Sunday worship in a public school has made us attractive for those who are afraid of church from past experience or for those who have no church experience to draw from. Our logo, "discover, grow, serve," plays out well.

Discovery Church uses a variety of media, music and courses to help people discover God and grow in a relationship with him. There is something for almost every learning style, to help the Gospel come alive in the not-yet-believer, the tired believer, or the weak believer. Through this learning, some are discovering for the first time that they have unique gifts and talents that God would like them to use. Consequently, each person is encouraged to participate, in whatever way God has wired them, whether it's



in the church (administration, drama, dance, hospitality, music) or in our community at large.

If a month has five Sundays, we become the sermon on the fifth Sunday by "Taking it to the Street" – doing acts of love together in our community. We also perform grunt work at the many Downtown Bowmanville events, host a free carnival, and partner with several other organizations in our community. Discovery Church places a high emphasis on giving God glory through giving back out of gratitude to him, thereby showing God's love with no strings attached.

There is a lot to Discover on our website, too, from newsletters, pictures, blogs and teaching: www.discoverychurch.ca.

All-Nations CRC in Halifax, Nova Scotia

from an interview with Rob Stel

You could argue that the CRC's life in Canada began in Halifax. Thousands of immigrants from the Netherlands landed in Nova Scotia during the Pier 21 years (1928-1971), but only a few stayed. As a result, All-Nations CRC is less Dutch than you might expect.

The church building is at least 100 years old: "by the grace of God, it's vertical every week." Thanks to the efforts of a dedicated property and finance committee, however, the unique structure remains quite beautiful. It was originally a Methodist Church, but after the Methodists merged with the United Church, they didn't need this building. The Methodists wanted it to remain a church, so they sold it to the CRC community for the price of the land, minus what it would cost to tear down the building.

Like most cities, Halifax has its poor areas and its more upscale areas, and All-Nations CRC is right on the border between them. Consequently, it has run a food pantry for



a long time, as well as a clothing exchange program. "It's a unique church in that they still have a very involved diaconate – not just internally focused, but focused on the community." It's a small church, only about 80 members, "so you get a lot of people wearing a lot of hats." And in 2009, as in the Pier 21 days, it's still a church that welcomes new and arriving immigrants from countries all over the world.